

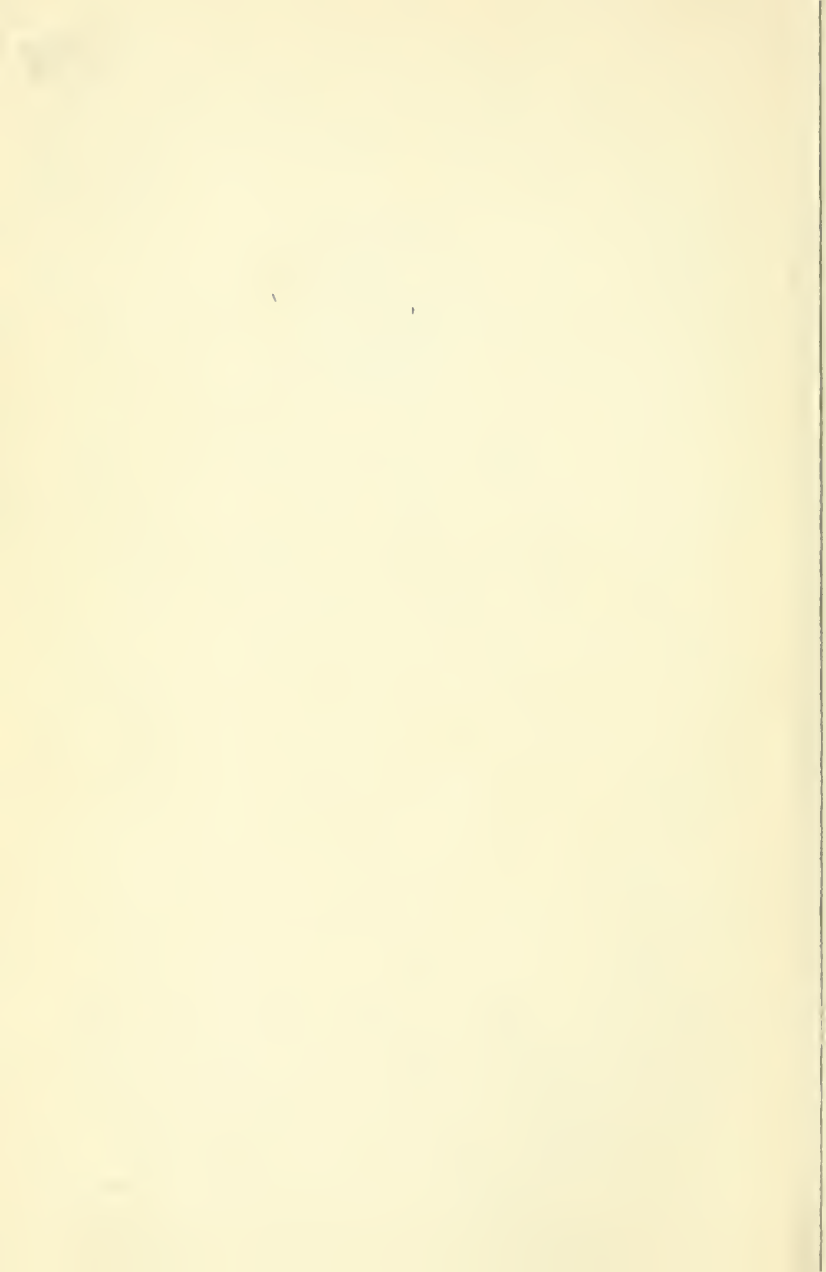
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THE PHOTOGRAPH.

A Novel.

BY
WINIFRED CARMICHAEL.

SYDNEY :
PUBLISHED BY THE N.S.W. L.I.

1910

Printed at the Bulmer Printing Works,
527 Kent Street, Sydney.

PN
9619.3
C212p

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THE PHOTOGRAPH.

PROLOGUE.

The "Nereid," an ocean liner bound for Southampton, is ploughing her way through the turbulent waters of the Great Australian Bight. The sea, lashed to great foamy billows, occasionally breaks over her side. But the gallant steamer is pounding into it all regardless of wind and weather. She is too proud and powerful to take much notice of the elements.

It is five o'clock on a stormy evening in April. The broad promenade deck is almost deserted; most of the passengers are below in their berths, sea-sick; some of them, the more timid ones, are sending up supplications to One who watches over the traveller at all times and in all places. A few of the passengers are in the Smoke Room playing bridge. They are all of the sterner sex, except one lady, a Mrs.

Thornton, who is almost as good a sailor as the Second Officer, whose partner she is at cards this afternoon.

Ralph Thornton, a man of middle height and that air of good breeding which is unmistakeable, made his way slowly along the slippery deck and looked in at the Smoking Saloon window with an expression of disgust on his good looking face at his wife, who lit a fresh cigarette, sublimely indifferent to whatever he might feel. He turned away from the Smoking saloon window, and buttoning his overcoat up round his neck, he held on to the rail with both hands, looking out on the black sky and grey sea. His thoughts at that moment were in keeping with the elements. He was a prey to bitter, unavailing regret.

Four years ago on his twenty-first birthday, he had made this woman his wife, and had paid dearly for it ever since. His mother had tried by every means in her power to prevent such a union. He remembered how she had gone to his room early on the morning he had come of age. How often he had recalled her words since then: "My son," she had said with infinite appeal in her gentle voice, "you are of age to-day. Do not, I implore you, let your first action be one that you will regret all your life. Do not drag your father's honoured name in the dust by bestowing it on such a woman." He remembered the hot bitter words with which he had answered her, and that day he had married Ursuline

Maynard, a variety actress, regardless of what his widowed mother's feelings in the matter might be. How many young men lose their high ideals by intercourse with women of Ursuline Maynard's type. As soon as the law had made her his wife and she felt secure in her new position, the mask she had worn for his edification dropped from her, as did the veneer of her acquired manner, and a month after their marriage he knew her for what she was—a woman of coarse fibre and vulgar mind. She hurt his sensibility, and wounded his pride again and again. His mother refused to receive her and he found himself cut off from all his old friends and treated with aloofness by everybody who was worth knowing.

He had brought his wife to Australia hoping that in a new world where the people were not so conservative, she would be received in a better circle than that to which she had been accustomed, and perhaps she would benefit by intercourse with them. But he soon found that the Australians were, if anything, quicker to discern the inner man than their fellow subjects across the sea. The people, who were only too pleased to know him, quickly turned their backs on both as soon as his wife was introduced. A letter from his lawyer had informed him that his estates needed his personal attention, so after four years' absence he was returning to his native land. He had suggested to his wife that she should remain in Sydney until his return. But this

she had flatly refused to do, so there was nothing for it but to take the woman to whom he was bound by what should have been the holiest tie on earth, but which was to him a galling one, back to England.

He turned away from the rail as the dressing bell rang over the deserted decks, and met the Captain who had just descended the white ladder that led down to the promenade deck.

"What time do we get into Fremantle?" Thornton asked.

"About four in the morning, I should say," was the answer.

Thornton went down the companion way to the cabin occupied by his wife and himself.

Mrs. Thornton had nearly finished her toilette, a most elaborate one. She looked up with a smile on her sensuous red lips as her husband drew back the curtain which hung over the cabin door.

Ursuline Thornton was twenty-eight years of age. Her figure which had been the perfection of grace in its tall slenderness four years ago was now obese. Her shoulders and arms which at the present moment were uncovered, were snowy white, but much too stout to wear a décolleté dress at any time, and quite out of good taste for dinner on board ship. She literally blazed with diamonds, her husband's gifts to her before marriage, which were worth a fortune. She was gowned in scarlet chiffon over glacé silk; the skirt of the dress was

trimmed with flounces of chiffon edged with black silk lace; around her ample waist, she wore a black sash, the streamers of which fell to the bottom of her long trained skirt and were fringed at the ends.

Thornton surveyed her with disapproval in his brooding, pessimistic eyes.

"Well!" she said, noticing the glance, "do you not like my get-up?"

"No, you look horrible. For God's sake, don't put on any more finery," he cried irritably as she took up a large red butterfly made of chiffon and tinsel wire. "Try and remember you are on board ship and not on the stage of the Tivoli."

"I am sorry you don't like it," she said, lightly fastening the offending ornament in her elaborately dressed hair. "But perhaps I am dressing to please some one else. As you never pay me any attention you cannot object if some one else does."

"My dear madam, I don't object to anything you do. If I did, I should seriously object to your decking yourself out in all that tawdry finery, and covering yourself with jewels. But remember you bear my name, and I shall have no hesitation in seeking release, if you drag that name in the dust. I do not approve of you always being in that fellow Martini's company; you will be the talk of the ship next. Now, if you will kindly get out of here while I dress, I will be much obliged; you fill the cabin with that horrible long-tailed thing."

She took up a fleecy wrap composed of white and silver and turned to leave the room, but came back when she reached the doorway.

"I want you to give me some money," she said. "I have lost heavily at bridge this afternoon."

"How much?" asked Thornton.

"Fifty pounds."

"Fifty pounds!" he repeated in surprise. "Surely you don't play for such high stakes that you can lose all that money in one afternoon."

"No, that will free me from the debt I have got into since we left Sydney."

"Well, I shall not give you the money you so calmly ask for; your allowance is more than enough for a woman in a much better position than yourself, and if you will get into debt, you must make it do to get you out again."

She stood looking at him with an expression of baffled rage on her rouged powdered face.

"If you do not give it to me, I will drown myself," she said in low, tense tones.

He shrugged his shoulders as he faced his reflection in the mirror while adjusting his tie.

"I have heard those threats of suicide so often, that I have got quite used to them. "Well," turning to face her as she stood looking at him with a look that was not good to see. "Have you anything more to say? If not, I will thank you to move out of the doorway and let me pass. There is the dinner gong, are you coming?"

"No, I don't want any dinner."

"Very good, although I should have thought you would be most anxious to grace the dining saloon with your presence after going to the trouble of a toilette like that."

"I hate you, you beast," she cried passionately, "and you will see whether I mean it, when I do drown myself."

He gave his shoulders an impatient shrug as he passed out leaving her there alone, and as he did so he was conscious of a distinct odour of brandy from her breath.

* * * *

Ralph Thornton looked up from his plate abruptly as did every other diner in the saloon. Obviously something unusual had happened on deck. A rushing of many feet overhead attracted their attention, while almost simultaneously the "Nereid's" tumultuous heart ceased to beat, her mighty pulse was still.

With one accord the men rose to their feet as the deck steward hurried down the companion and to the after end of the saloon. The man's face wore a nervous, almost frightened, expression. He came to where Thornton was standing.

"I am awfully sorry, sir, to have to tell you but—but your wife——"

"Speak out, man," Thornton exclaimed, a nameless fear gripping his heart. "What is the matter?"

"Your wife has fallen overboard," the steward's white lips blurted out.

In two seconds Thornton was on deck. The Captain stood surrounded by an anxious group of men, half blinded by spray and salt water, straining their eyes in the gathering dusk to where a few hundred yards away a red object in the water was plainly discernable, which the angry waves were making a plaything of. No need to be told who it was; Thornton knew that black lace trimmed red dress only too well, also the silk-fringed black sash that the wind was lifting in and out of the water.

While they stood there the saloon doors were opened and a haggard row of women's faces peered out; a quarter master held the passengers back with comforting news there was nothing to fear; some one overboard, no! not anybody belonging to them. The passenger was Mrs. Thornton. They turned back shocked but relieved.

"Great Heavens!" one of the men exclaimed. "However does she manage to keep afloat in such a sea, she must be a powerful swimmer. Ah, there she has gone under."

The ship's boat, manned by an able crew, was making its way to where Ursuline Thornton had last been seen, although it was difficult to make much headway in such a sea. But the gallant little boat impelled by the strong and regular beat of the oars rode bravely to the spot where the passenger had sunk. The crew strained their eyes for the

slightest sign of the red gown, but it was almost dark now.

Ralph Thornton, from the deck of the steamer, watched them in breathless suspense. Presently his eyes were riveted on a small red object that floated by on the crest of a wave; it was the gauze butterfly Ursuline had worn in her hair. In the dim light he could see another article of white and silver, tossed hither and thither by the foam-crested billows. It was the wrap she had worn around her shoulders only half an hour ago.

The boat which had been launched to try and save the drowning woman, returned to the "Nereid" after an unsuccessful search for the woman or her body.

The passengers had not taken much notice of Ralph Thornton; they considered him morose and self-absorbed; but with that touch of nature that makes the whole world kin, they turned to him now, expressing their sympathy and sorrow.

"You would like me to make some inquiries in your presence, perhaps," the Captain said, wringing Thornton's hand in silent sympathy.

"Yes."

"Did any of you notice Mrs. Thornton on deck?" the Captain asked, turning to a group of grave-looking men.

"I saw her a quarter of an hour before I heard she had fallen overboard," answered a tall, dark man, who was standing among the other passen--

gers. "I was going down to dinner and met her on her way up to the deck. I asked her if she was not going to dine, and she replied that she did not feel well enough. She requested me to send the stewardess up to her, which I did before going to dinner myself."

"Send the stewardess up here to me," ordered the Captain, turning to a steward.

"Were you with Mrs. Thornton when she fell overboard?" the Captain asked when Mrs. Halsford came in answer to his summons.

"Yes, Sir, I was with her," replied the woman, who seemed greatly upset by the tragic occurrence.

"Did you actually see her fall overboard?"

"Yes, Sir, she told me she was ill and asked me to get her some brandy. But even as I turned to obey her, the boat gave a lurch and almost before I knew what had happened she had disappeared. I rushed to the side and saw her struggling in the water; I gave the alarm at once."

"Was there anyone else on deck?"

"No, Sir, everyone was at dinner; the quarter master was on deck the other side of the ship."

"Did you see anything of what happened?" inquired the Captain turning to the quarter master.

"No, Sir, the first I saw or heard was Mrs. Halsford giving the alarm. I came quickly over to this side, but the boat had left the lady some distance behind in the water. I could plainly see her

although it was nearly dark; she wore such a bright red dress."

"Did you notice if Mrs. Thornton looked ill, Mr. Martini?" asked the Captain, turning to the foreign looking man who had given the information that he had spoken to Mrs. Thornton on her way up to the deck.

"I hardly noticed, the light was behind her; she was dressed in red, I know that."

Ralph Thornton had not spoken during the time the Captain had interrogated Mr. Martini and the stewardess. But his face betrayed the horror and regret he felt at his wife's untimely death.

Late that night when the passengers were sleeping in their berths and the "Nereid" seemed to slumber too with the regular beating of her great restless heart, Thornton sat in his cabin his troubled mind going over the events of the day. Had Ursuline's last words contained truth or had her death been an accident? He would have given all his wealth to know that she had not taken her own life.

"I wish," he murmured, "that I had given her the money she asked me for. God knows our marriage was not a happy one, but would it had ended differently. I am afraid I was not tolerant enough."

At last worn out with conflicting emotions, he took off his dinner coat and threw himself on the bottom berth something hard came in contact with

his tired limbs. He raised the quilt and discovered a brandy bottle containing a third of its measure of the raw spirit. He held it up to the light to examine it.

"Poor girl!" he murmured, "so that was it. I always thought that fatal habit would lead to her ultimate destruction. I know she ordered that bottle of brandy just before lunch to-day."

The dawn was just creeping up into the eastern sky touching the face of the waters with a soft pearly light, and a few streaks of cloud became faintly outlined. The moon looked yellow and death-like when the "Nereid" moved into her anchorage at Fremantle. But Thornton did not see the dawn, did not awaken until the task of loading the vessel began. He had been sleeping the heavy sleep of exhaustion; most of the passengers whose journey ended at West Australia had gone ashore when Thornton came on deck. He determined to leave the "Nereid," and continue his journey to England by another boat; somehow he felt he could not travel on that steamer where such tragic happening had taken place.

CHAPTER I.

Five years later, on a beautiful June morning, two people were sitting in a pleasant sunlit room. From the windows one could see velvety green lawns and blazing flower beds of rich colour ; and beyond the broad green valley, where the Thames winds like a silver ribbon past trees and meadows of true English greenness.

To speak correctly only one person sat, while the other got up every few minutes to gaze out on the beautiful landscape before him with unseeing eyes. His mind at that moment was not capable of knowing or seeing anything but the intense anxiety which he vainly tried to hide.

The other was a lady of forty, a sweet-faced, good looking woman, with that indefinable air of one who has always lived in pleasant places and rolled over life's highways on easy springs. Mrs. Ford, for that was the lady's name, as a rule saw beauty in

all the exquisite sights of nature, but this morning she was deaf to the singing of the birds, the blossoming of the flowers, and the many sweet sights which as a rule filled her eyes and soul with gladness. In her beautiful bedroom upstairs, her daughter Una, Ralph Thornton's young wife, was having a hard fight for her life; the mother's eyes were shadowed, and a great fear dominated her senses, a fear that life and death might come hand in hand to visit Ralph Thornton's beautiful home in Richmond. Mrs. Ford had known very little sorrow in her sheltered life. Her husband's love had seemed to stand between her and life's storms and tempests. John and Alma Ford had two daughters, the only children who had come to bless an unusually happy marriage. The eldest, Una Thornton, aged twenty, and Enid who would be eighteen in a few days' time.

Ralph Thornton and his mother-in-law had hardly spoken a word during the last hour. They were both strung to such a high pitch of nervous tension that speech seemed impossible between them. They both started at every footstep on the stairs, every sound overhead.

They heard the housekeeper, Mrs. Craik, go to the telephone and ring up another doctor, an eminent London physician, Sir Gerald Fane. Ralph Thornton's heart sank as he strained his ears to catch the message.

"Merciful Heavens!" he murmured under his

breath, clenching his hands until the nails cut almost into his flesh. "It will take Sir Gerald quite half an hour to get here even if he leaves Harley Street directly he gets the message, and all that time my darling's life is in danger."

Shortly after the housekeeper's message had been given over the wire, the hall door bell rang; a maid went with quick steps to answer it, for Una was beloved by the servants, and every one of them would have done anything for their fair young mistress in this her hour of trial.

Thornton heard a man's voice ask a question and hope leaped to his heart,—Sir Gerald Fane already, the great man must have been in Richmond when Mrs. Craik rang up.

The doctor gave him a cheering nod as he quickly ascended the stairs, and Thornton went back into the room where he knew Mrs. Ford was enduring agonies of suspense.

"That was Sir Gerald Fane," he said in answer to her unspoken question.

An hour passed which seemed to the man and woman waiting there to be an eternity, and then a light footstep outside the door caused them to look at each other with mingled hope and dread.

They both looked up as Mrs. Craik entered the room anxious to learn from the housekeeper's

expression if the news was good. Mrs. Craik's comely face wore a smile of relief.

"All is well," she said; "the mistress is out of danger and a beautiful little daughter is born to you, Sir."

Until Mrs. Ford heard the glad news, she did not realise what she had suffered during the past five or six hours. She burst into a flood of tears—tears of glad relief.

Thornton turned to the housekeeper. "Will you send Mrs. Ford some refreshment at once?" he asked. Then as the door closed behind the housekeeper, he said gently,

"Do not give way now, little mater, after bearing up so bravely. How thankful I am to Providence that Una is safe."

Half an hour passed and then Dr. Debenham, the old physician who had attended Mr. Ford's family for the last twenty years, came down the massive stairway, accompanied by Sir Gerald Fane and found Thornton waiting in the Hall.

"Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. Thornton, a beautiful little girl," said Dr. Debenham.

"But my wife?" Thornton inquired.

"She is very weak, but with the care she will get from Nurse Carr, she will soon recover her strength. Don't you think so, Sir Gerald?"

"Oh, yes, she will be all right now. You can see her in an hour's time. But remember, no excitement. However, I think we can trust the nurse to see to that," the great specialist said with a smile as he shook hands with Thornton.

.

Una Thornon turned her blue eyes on her husband as he entered her room with a look of infinite love in their clear depths.

He bent to kiss her pale lips. "My darling," he breathed, "My Queen, who has won her crown. The sweetest crown on earth, that of motherhood."

Truly there is no moment in life so fraught with happiness to the wife who truly loves her lord, as that in which he comes to her for the first time after the safe advent of her infant in the world.

The weary months of doubt and longing are past; the bitter travail is over and lo, a babe is born. A babe, woman's most treasured, most highly prized possession.

What a wonderful conception it is, sinless and innocent, fresh from the hands of the Omnipotent.

Together both parents gaze on the small puckered face in which they fondly imagine they can trace some likeness to each other. Its helplessness

appeals to them, this tiny thing which is a proof of their love, and a divine rapture fills the souls of both.

Surely there is something morally wrong with the woman who, secure in the protection of her husband's love, and finding in his companionship solace and sympathy for the trials of maternity, fails to fulfil the obligations of matrimony by refusing to bring forth at the Creator's bidding and with His divine help the best fruits of her womanhood. How many a flame has never been kindled, which might have helped to illumine the world, leaving behind it for the benefit of mankind a never-ending ray of light.

CHAPTER II.

"Does she not look sweet, the darling," Enid Ford exclaimed, bending to kiss her sister's six weeks old baby, who had that morning been short coated, to use an old-fashioned phrase. "May I have her, nurse?"

"Of course you can, Miss Ford. Sit down here out of the draught, and I will put baby on your lap."

Una Thornton was standing before the long mirror arranging the soft tresses of golden hair which covered her small head. She turned from her reflection in the glass to smile at the pretty picture her sister made with the baby in her arms.

"How lovely you look in that white frock, Enid, is mine exactly the same?"

"Exactly, I was fitted for both so that when they are soiled and go to the laundry, we will not know one from another, when they come back. Ah, here comes nurse with yours."

The dresses both sisters wore were of white Indian linen, richly embroidered. Their father, a soft goods merchant, had bought them on his last trip to India. Enid Ford, who had only just left school, felt quite proud of being in long dresses and having her hair up.

"Why, Una," Enid cried, "Baby has the mark on her arm; how plain it is."

"Yes," smiled her sister, "I cannot deny that she is my daughter with that unmistakable beauty spot."

"Your sister has one on the left breast," interposed the nurse.

"Yes," answered Enid, "so have I. The Fords have all had that mark for generations past."

She bent her pretty head to examine more closely the mark on the baby's dimpled arm. It was intensely black and decidedly heart-shaped, not quite as large as a threepenny piece.

"It is not unlike a large mole," Nurse Carr said.

"That is what it resembles most," replied Enid; "one of my father's sisters had that mark on her cheek; she was quite proud of her beauty spot."

"How alike you two sisters are," Nurse Carr said, "and yet you are different; no one would mistake one for the other."

"Our coloring is different," Mrs. Thornton said, raising her arms for the nurse to clasp a silver belt round her slim waist.

"Now, dear Mrs. Thornton, you must rest before going down stairs. I will get you some refreshment," Nurse Carr said.

The nurse left the room and the sisters were alone.

Looking at them as they sat there together on this glorious July morning, one would ask himself where the likeness was. The two sisters resembled each other in form, in feature, in expression. They were of exactly the same height and figure. But where Una's hair was of pale gold, Enid's was a dark golden brown. Una's eyes were as blue as the sky on a summer's day; Enid's resembled the dark dense grey clouds which obscure that smiling sunlit sky in stormy weather. Her coloring was more vivid than her sister's, her hair had the same natural curl growing upward in heavy jutting waves from her lovely forehead. But it was stronger, more rebellious than Una's, suggesting greater vitality, more perfect physique. But their faces were exactly alike in shape and expression, the same beautiful mouths with tender, seductive curves in lips and chin. The same unexpected dimples came into play when they smiled. The eyes of both were veiled by long black lashes. Both sisters had the same trick of expression in their eyes.

They might be likened to twin lilies growing on one root. Although both exactly alike in appearance, one lily is of stronger texture than the other; the stalk is more solid, the sap fuller. A storm

passes over, bending and shaking the flowers, while copious showers fall on their beauty unceasingly for hours, and then the storm is passed, the sky is blue and smiling. But what of the flowers which were so rudely shaken? One of them is broken and as it droops to earth is already discoloring and in a few hours will be a decayed and withered piece of vegetation. But the other lily is quite uninjured by the storm and lifts its face to the sun more beautiful than before. Whatever specks of dust had marred its snowy whiteness have been washed away by the rain, and now its perfect purity and its heart of gold is more accentuated than ever; so it would be with Una Thornton and her sister Enid Ford. The younger girl's stronger vitality would carry her through life's storms and trials, while her sister would fall in the warfare, should she be called upon to fight life's battles to any great extent.

CHAPTER III.

"What is the matter, my darling?" asked Ralph Thornton. "Has Enid said that Doris is not the most beautiful baby on earth or—why little wife, you are really upset. Tell me what is the cause," as Una laid her face against his breast with a little sob.

"She has lost her wedding ring," Enid told him. She had laid the baby on the bed so that she might help Nurse Carr to search for the missing ring.

"I had it on my finger when I came from my bath," Una said, "so it cannot be far away. It has never been off before, and now——"

Tears choked her utterance. Her husband bent to kiss the sweet face which was still much too pale.

"Your hands are getting thin," he said, looking down at them. "I am afraid you will have to give up nursing baby yourself. I think it is too much for you."

"I am sure it is," the nurse interposed. "She is a healthy infant and would do just as well on artificial food."

"Well," asked Ralph Thornton tenderly, "are you ready to come down stairs? Your mother has everything arranged for your comfort on the lawn under the beech tree."

"I can't go without my wedding ring," Una answered tearfully.

"Of course you can, dearest; I will take you down now, and the room can be turned out; the ring is sure to be found in some hole or corner. I will give orders for a couple of men servants to lift all the furniture. Put your arms round my neck, so."

He lifted her in his strong arms and carried her downstairs and out on to the sunny lawn where Mrs. Ford awaited her.

She smiled lovingly at her first born, as Thornton laid her tenderly back among the cushions of her easy chair.

"How good to have you amongst us again, dear," Mrs. Ford said. "How pleased your father will be to see you downstairs. He is coming to spend the day with you, and I must return home with him this evening. But I will leave Enid at Richmond until you are quite yourself again."

"As soon as Una is strong enough, she and I are going on another honeymoon trip, and I hope when we return she will have got all her roses back," Ralph Thornton said, looking anxiously at

his wife. Surely she was paler to-day than she was yesterday; but he told himself now that she was able to come down stairs she would soon recover her strength.

"How nice you look, my darling," her mother murmured. "I am pleased you have worn that dress. We have arranged for a photographer to come here to-day and take yours and baby's photograph."

"In fact," Ralph Thornton added, "we are all going to be photographed. Your father suggested that you and Enid should be taken standing together with that climbing rose for a background. But I am afraid that would tire you to-day, dear. But you and baby can be photographed here without you even getting up from your chair."

"If I had my wedding ring, I should be strong enough for anything," Una murmured. They were alone now; Mrs. Ford had gone to join in the search for the missing ring.

"My darling," her husband said tenderly, "you are surely not going to let a little thing like that upset you. There are plenty more rings where that came from, even if they do find it, which they are certain to do."

"But, Ralph, no other ring would have the same value for me. It has never been off my finger till now since you placed it there on our wedding day."

"Sweetheart," he answered, "how well I remember holding your hand while I slipped it on. But," looking down on her small thin hand, "it was much

plumper than it is now. I am longing for the time to come when you will be strong enough to travel. You will regain your strength and put a little more flesh on in no time."

"Oh, here is nurse with baby."

"It is time for baby to have her drink, Mrs. Ford. Shall I wait for her?" the nurse asked.

"No, you need not, we will keep her with us. It is delightful out here in the sunshine."

Ralph Thornton's eyes rested on his wife and child as Una sat with the baby in her arms. The mother had bared her white breast, and as the infant drew through its rosy lips the life-giving stream, he thought of a picture he had seen somewhere abroad of the Madonna and the Infant Saviour. How sweet she was, this fair young wife whom he so fondly loved. Surely now his cup of happiness was full to the brim. The flowers were blossoming in his garden of delight.

The baby's dimpled arm was thrown upwards a little, and on its fair surface just above the elbow, the heart-shaped black mark showed plainly, while one exactly like it was visible on the mother's left breast.

CHAPTER IV.

Alma Ford was an artist of no mean ability, and more than one small water coloring of hers had been judged worthy of a place in the Royal Academy. With her dreamy poetic temperament and beauty-loving nature she saw loveliness in things that most of us would pass by with a casual glance, and both her daughters had inherited her pure mind and the love of nature. But on this beautiful morning in July, Mrs. Ford had a sense of obsession upon her as she went slowly to the room where the lady from the photographers awaited her. Una's wedding ring had not been found although the room had been turned literally inside out. Obviously it was not in the room. What had become of it?

"Good morning, Miss Gray," she said, extending her hand to a bright-looking woman of thirty. "I am glad you were able to come; I asked them particularly to send you to Richmond this morning. I

want you to take several photos. of my daughters. You know that Mrs. Thornton has a little one."

"Yes, I hope she is well, Mrs. Ford."

"Yes, thank you, she is gradually getting stronger. To-day is the first time she has been down stairs. Now, Miss Gray, I want you to take a particularly charming picture of my two daughters together. They are dressed exactly alike to-day in white. If Mrs. Thornton feels equal to standing, I thought the rose-wreathed door of the arbor would be a fitting background for the picture. Then we must have a photo. of the mother and babe, and of Enid and Una separately. And, Miss Gray, when you send me the photos. to choose from, I should like a properly finished picture, not an unfinished proof. The former gives one a better impression. Now, if you will bring your camera we will go on to the lawn where Mrs. Thornton is sitting."

The footsteps of the two women made no sound on the velvet lawn as they approached the spot where Una Thornton sat with her baby at her breast. Mrs. Ford stopped abruptly and laid her hand on the other woman's arm to arrest her footsteps. The beauty of the scene appealed to all that was artistic in her nature. Una sat there alone, (Thornton had gone into the house for another wrap for baby) all round her was the sweet beauty of the summer, the deep blue sky seemed reflected in her eyes. And on her face was the expression which is

only to be found on a good woman's face as she looks with wonderment and delight on her first born. Mrs. Ford stood looking at the picture before her, wrapt in a reverie which even Miss Gray's presence at her side did not disturb. It was one of those moments when time and the world seemed to stand still, floating away on those chimerical clouds that lay between reality and dreamland. The portals of time had swung back on their hinges and twenty years were annihilated.

In memory's mirror, Alma Ford saw not the girl mother before her, but her own young self when she had held Una to her breast. In fancy she could feel the touch of tiny fingers and baby lips. She was so lost in infinite imaginings that Miss Gray touched her arm and spoke twice before the older woman came back to the realities of life.

"Would you like a picture of her as she is now?" she whispered, "the light is perfect and her pose is grace itself."

"Yes," answered Mrs. Ford. "I should like just one copy for myself," and so before Una was aware that there was anyone but herself on the lawn the picture was taken.

The photographer spent quite an hour taking photographs of the two sisters together, alone and in different positions, until Ralph Thornton declared he would not allow Una to have any more excitement. So Miss Gray went away taking the plates with her.

CHAPTER V.

A happy group of people sat round Una's chair some hours later ; Ralph Thornton, Mrs. Ford and her husband and Enid with the baby on her lap.

The air was warm and balmy and yet so divinely exhilarating that already Una's pale face was beginning to show a few faint roses.

Mr. Ford, a fine looking man of fifty, the head of a softgoods firm, had taken a holiday from business so that he could spend the day at Richmond with his dearly loved daughter, who seemed to have come back to him from the shadow of death.

They sat there in happy converse, their happiness unclouded, life looking at its best, totally oblivious of the blow an adverse fate was about to deal to every one of them. The sound of a woman's skirt making a sh-sh on the green sward at their feet attracted their attention. They all looked up with one accord and saw regarding them with a leering smile on the face which had once been handsome,

but which was now coarse and bloated with drink and debauchery, a woman about thirty-two years of age, clad in a bedraggled black grenadine dress, a shabby feather boa round her neck; altogether she presented a poverty-stricken, down-at-the-heels appearance.

Mrs. Ford rose from her seat.

"What do you want?" she said. "If it is one of the servants, that path over there leads to their quarters."

"It is not one of the servants, and if it was I should ring for them as is befitting the mistress of the house," the woman replied, looking at Thornton, who stood, his eyes dilated, his heart frozen with the dumb horror of a dreamer unable to wake. "It is my husband, Mr. Ralph Thornton, I am bestowing the pleasure of this visit upon."

Mr. Ford rose angrily to his feet and looked at Thornton. But the latter might have been carved in stone, such a medusa-like effect did the appearance of this woman have on him.

Una lay back on the soft cushions of her easy chair, as yet not understanding what this woman's visit meant.

"My God!" Thornton cried, his voice hoarse and strained, "where did you come from? What is your name?"

Ursuline laughed discordantly. "Surely, you

ought to know my name well enough," she said mockingly, "you called me by it often and fondly during the four years that followed our marriage."

"You lie. I saw my wife Ursuline drown before my own eyes five years ago."

"My dear credulous husband, you only thought and hoped you saw me drowned in the Australian Bight. What you saw was a bundle weighted with lead in the middle and dressed up in the red evening dress you admired so much. Do you remember the butterfly composed of tinsel wire and red chiffon I wore in my hair. Do you remember the wrap of white and silver? You saw them float past you as you stood on the deck of the 'Nereid' and I saw the same from the porthole of the stewardess's cabin."

"You Fiend!"

Ursuline laughed a pleased little laugh of malice and triumph.

"What a difference in your manner of addressing me now to the tone you used so fondly when you were madly, passionately, in love with me, when we were first married, when——

"Stop!" he cried passionately, "and tell me what was your reason for this diabolical deed; even the devil has some reason for the evil he creates."

"My dear husband, how dull you are, a man with brains would have known at once it was revenge."

"Revenge for what?"

"For the insults you heaped upon me, the way you neglected me, the——"

"Where have you hidden yourself all these years?" he interrupted.

"I left the 'Nereid' at Fremantle as soon as she touched the wharf. In the early dawn and with the help of the stewardess I went ashore disguised and unnoticed. I stayed in Australia for three years, for the last two I have been in England. I was in the church the day you fondly imagined you made that insipid looking doll your wife, and what is she now and her baby?"

"My God, take care, woman," Thornton thundered as he stepped close to her and seized her by the shoulder, pressing his strong hand heavily upon it, a dangerous glitter in his eyes. "Go now, before I add murder to the sin of desire."

"Here, take this," drawing a handful of loose gold from his pocket. "Send me word where you are to be found and I will see you in the morning."

The woman shrugged her shoulders.

"Really," she said, "I think it is rather cool ordering me to leave my own house. But I always was an obliging sort. But remember, I shall expect you to get rid of your mistress as soon as possible, so that I can take my place here without delay. Well, ta-ta."

She turned and went over the lawn, the frayed edge of her skirt trailing behind her.

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Thornton watched the woman whom he knew to be his lawful wife go through the massive iron gates into the street and then he turned back to the group on the lawn.

They had all remained as motionless as marble statues, during the interview with Thornton and the woman. But as he came back to them they woke simultaneously to the realities of life.

"The strangeness of this sudden thing that had happened, stunning their faculties, was clear to them; it was one of those awful swift tragedies that strip away all conventions, all so-called probabilities.

The deep blue sky was paling to a misty grey as if in sympathy with the terrible sorrow it was looking down upon. Enid clasped the baby she held more tightly in her arms, as if she would protect it from the slur that woman had cast at it. Mr. Ford's stalwart figure seemed to have become that of an old man's during the last ten minutes. Great drops of shame and horror stood on his brow, while his wife's sweet face plainly showed the anguish of mind she felt.

Una had risen from her chair and stood pressing the hand from which the wedding ring was missing to her heart. As Thornton came to her, she

stretched out the other hand to him. Every vestige of color had left her face, leaving it stricken to an utter desolation.

"My angel," the grief-stricken man murmured.

She looked up at him as one looks at their best and dearest for the last time. She tried to speak, but the words she would have uttered died on her lips, and the next moment she sank senseless into his arms.

"My God! the shock has killed her," he cried, pressing despairing kisses on the lips that had never failed to respond to his lightest caress.

Mrs. Ford came forward, her own lips quivering, her blue eyes full of woe.

"She has swooned," she said tremulously. "Carry her up to her own room and lay her on the bed."

Then, as he obeyed her request, she turned to her husband who stood mute and passive under this great blow.

"Go to the telephone and ring up for the doctor," she said, touching his hand with a mute caress. "Do not give way, dear, we will need all our fortitude to help our darling through this cruel calamity."

They went away leaving Enid sitting there with the baby in her arms. Left alone the girl seemed to suddenly realise the awfulness of the cloud which

had descended upon them, enveloping them in its blackness.

"Ah, Baby," she cried, her tears falling on the sleeping infant's face, "surely God must have slept while this took place. Why should such a heritage of shame be yours?"

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"I can do nothing," Dr. Debenham said, looking pityingly on the sorrow-stricken group before him. "She has gone beyond all earthly aid. She was really not strong enough to stand a shock. Try and bear up, old friend," he said as Mr. Ford staggered back, "try and remember she would not change places with any of us."

During the last half hour they had all clung to every shred and patch of hope, wrapping the miserable garment round them and taking what comfort they could from the rags. Thornton had spent the last half hour in purgatory, now he had fallen lower into the depths.

"Are you quite sure?" he gasped, looking at the doctor. The only thing alive in his stony face was his anguished eyes.

"Quite sure," the old doctor answered pityingly. "She has been dead fully half an hour."

It was only too true. Una would never look at him again, her blue eyes alight with the love she had given him in such full measure. He would never again feel her slight form nestling in his arms. A cruel blow had cut her down in the very heyday of

her youth. Just when the lily had been perfected a storm had passed over it, crushing out its life and leaving only the remembrance of its fragrance to console the heart-broken parents, leaving her little daughter motherless and the father of that little daughter crushed to earth with despair. Just when his cup of happiness had been full an evil fate had dashed it aside, before he could taste the full sweetness, leaving her fair young sister with a cloud to mar the happiness of her innocent youth.

When they undressed the dead girl and let down the heavy coils of golden hair, from out the sunny masses there rolled the wedding ring, the loss of which had troubled her more than any of them dreamt of. In arranging her tresses the ring must have slipped from her thin finger into a coil of the hair which was almost the same color, and Una had fastened it in unwittingly with a hair pin.

In the beautiful home where life and joy had clasped hands in the morning, death and sorrow had now cast their gloom. The change wrought by the hand of an evil woman, whom Ralph Thornton in the hot impetuous passion of his youth had made his wife, had spoilt not only his own life, but had sent a fair young mother to an early grave, leaving him desolate for all time to come.

CHAPTER VI.

So rapidly had tragic events trod one upon the heels of the other in Thornton's household that day, that even the very servants were paralysed. Mrs. Ford had fallen into a death-like swoon which brought her so near to the edge of the grave that physician and nurse remained at her bedside for hours, and now she lay motionless but conscious on her bed, with her hand held in the husband's who had sheltered her with his love and care for the last twenty-one years.

"Keep her very quiet," the old doctor had said when leaving. "Allow no one but Nurse Carr, your daughter and yourself to enter the room."

Presently she passed from subconsciousness to sleep. Mr. Ford left her to Nurse Carr's care and went to the room where Enid had sat for hours, the small form of the motherless infant clasped in her arms, as if she would shelter against the warmth of

her own breast the little one who had been suddenly bereft of its mother's love and care.

"My darling," her father said gently drawing the brown head back against his shoulder, "my brave little girl, we must try and keep up, you and I, your mother will need all our care. She is sleeping now; I will go down and see Ralph. Lay the little one down, dear, she is asleep. I will send you some refreshment. I cannot have my little girl ill."

Enid looked up at her father trying to hide the grief which shadowed her great grey eyes, and had left dark lines beneath them. She had his own strong self-reliant nature, a brave barque that would weather life's storms and always be at hand to help the weaker vessel.

She forced herself to swallow some hot tea when it came, and then went to the pretty room which Una had ordered to be prepared for the sister who was to stay with her until she regained her wonted strength.

She changed the white dress she had donned so light-heartedly this morning for the most sombre one she possessed. Now that she was alone, she let the tears she had striven so hard to keep back fall from her aching eyes. She looked up to where a life-sized oil painting of Una, living Una, in her wedding dress and bridal veil, was hanging. Mrs. Ford had painted it months ago, and her skilful hand had portrayed the happy laughing expression of the

beautiful face. The eyes of the picture followed Enid, and to the girl's fancy they almost glowed with life.

"I wonder what she tried to say before she fell senseless in Ralph's arms. I am sure it was something about baby. Ah, my sister," Enid cried aloud holding out her arms to the picture, "I will take care of your little one, she shall have all the love and care that I can give her."

The face of the picture seemed to kindle into life to the girl's imagination, a sweet smile seemed to curve the perfect lips.

Enid's heart ached with its load of anguish as she went to unlock the door in answer to a knock. Outside stood Nurse Carr.

"Your mother is asking for you, Miss Ford, if you will stay with her for a time, I will attend to the baby who is now awake."

Enid's eyes dilated with surprise when she entered her mother's chamber. The bed was empty, Mrs. Ford was not in the room. "She must have gone downstairs to Ralph and Father," the girl murmured. "I will go and see."

CHAPTER VII.

Ralph Thornton sat in the library on a chair drawn up to the table, his head on his folded arms, silent, motionless, as he had sat for the last four hours, deaf to all sounds, unconscious of everything save his own great misery and despair. Was it possible that yesterday was indeed vanished forever. That to-morrow must come of black and endless nights. Only this morning he had thanked God for his great happiness. Only a few hours ago Una had smiled up at him with such a wealth of love in her blue eyes. Could it really be true that she was gone from him for ever.

"God," he cried suddenly as he rose to his feet, "it cannot be, you are too merciful to allow such a thing to happen. She was so innocent, so sinless. Why should she lay down her life just when it was at its best and fairest?" He groaned aloud as he remembered the look in her eyes when she lost consciousness. This pure sweet flower which he had

cherished so tenderly had been gathered before it was full blown. A cruel hand had plucked it ruthlessly from its foundations and had flung it bruised and quivering to die in the arms that would fain have sheltered it from every rough wind that blows.

He groaned aloud in the stifling anguish of his heart. A longing for death assailed him, a feeling like that which prompts men to leap over the edge of a precipice. His eyes wandered to a table at the other end of the room, the drawer of which contained a loaded pistol. How easy it would be to end a life which had become intolerable. He went to the window and looked out; the day that had been born so fair was now merging into night, with black clouds obscuring the sky, and a steady downpour of rain descending on the beautiful landscape. How like his life on that particular day. He turned abruptly away from the window and walked across the room with quick decided steps. He opened the drawer wherein lay the pistol. He lifted it deliberately, intent on taking his own life, when the door opened and Mr. Ford entered the room. He looked at the younger man with a glance that held his.

"Put that pistol down, Ralph," he said steadily, "I have much to say to you before you do that."

Thornton, as if compelled by a stronger will than his own, laid the pistol on the table, and then turned and faced the man who during the last few hours seemed to have taken on his broad shoulders the burden of another twenty years.

Mr. Ford motioned Thornton to a chair and sat down opposite him.

"I did not think you were a coward, Ralph," he said, sternly; "I thought the man my daughter loved so dearly was made of better material than that."

"I cannot bear my life," Thornton said, weakly, "since my darling has been bereft of hers through my fault. I could not live through the agony or remorse that must follow."

"It is not your fault. This sad tragedy must leave its indelible mark on everyone of us, but you are not to blame. My British sense of justice must hold you guiltless, since you told me frankly all about your first marriage when you asked me for Una. Ralph, have you forgotten that you have Una's child to live for, Una who has gone where sorrow is a thing unknown? It is we who are left behind that must suffer. God was merciful indeed when He took her to Himself rather than let her remain here to bear a shame that to her nature would be more bitter than death itself, even though she were innocent."

CHAPTER VIII.

"Come in," Thornton said when Enid knocked at the library door.

The girl crossed the threshold and looked round the room for her mother. "Where is mother?" she asked. "Has she not been with you?"

Mr. Ford rose to his feet in surprise, not unmixed with anxiety.

"Your mother has not been here, dear; she is too ill to be out of bed. I left her in the nurse's care upstairs."

"She is not there," the girl answered; "nurse left her for a few minutes to summon me, and when I went to her room the bed was empty."

They hastened to the chamber where the body of the dead girl lay, her waxen hands crossed over the quiet heart, but the bereaved mother was not there. They looked anxiously at each other, when,

after a search through the beautiful mansion, Alma Ford was not to be found.

"She cannot have gone out of the house," Mr. Ford said; "it is pitch dark and raining heavily."

"Get some lanterns," Thornton ordered, putting his own great grief aside in his anxiety, and the servants flew to obey his orders.

"Father," Enid cried suddenly, pointing to a French window which was wide open, the rain and wind having free access to the room, "she must have gone to Una's favourite seat by the river."

Before anyone could prevent her, the girl had passed out, and bare-headed and uncloaked, ran with flying steps over the rain-soddened lawn, and through the well-kept garden to a rustic seat by the river where Una, her mother and herself had spent so many pleasant hours before little Doris was born. Mr. Ford caught up a lantern and quickly followed his daughter. When he arrived there Enid was wringing the water from the heavy masses of her mother's fair hair and chafing her cold hands. It was even as Enid had surmised. Alma Ford had slipped downstairs unobserved during the nurse's absence, and clad only in a loose white wrapper thrown over her nightdress, her bare feet thrust into thin shoes, had gone down to the river, where she and her dearly loved daughter had spent so many happy hours together. Oblivious in her grief and despair of the heavy rain, which had soaked her

through long before she reached the spot she sought, she had sat there heedless of the elements for the last half hour, absorbed in a great sorrow which her gentle nature was unable to cope with.

They raised the half fainting woman and bore her back to the house. She was undressed and put into a soft warm bed, but despite their care, next day she was in a high fever caused by pneumonia.

While she lay there unconscious, all that remained of the daughter she had so tenderly loved was laid to rest in the pretty cemetery, and over her grave there gleamed a white marble cross, which bore the inscription in gold letters:

Sacred to the memory of Una,
The dearly loved daughter of John and Alma Ford,
Aged 20 years.

CHAPTER IX.

Mr. Ford turned his haggard, careworn face on Sir Gerald Fane as the great physician came into the room where he was waiting, and closed the door after him.

"Well," Mr. Ford said, both hope and fear in his voice.

Sir Gerald blew his nose violently before replying; inured as he was to suffering and to inner glimpses into men's hearts, he shrunk from the task before him.

"I am sorry, Ford," he blurted out, "but I must tell you the truth. There is no hope. You must only look for consolation to Him who does what is best for the great end, but whose ways seem cruel to us who see but little of the way."

John Ford's strength seemed to leave him utterly. He sank into a chair and something like a moan escaped him. There was silence for a few moments, then Ford lifted his grey face,

"The nurse told me this morning the fever had left her," he said desperately.

"Yes, that is true, but the heart is weak. She has not enough strength to recover. Your wife has and always had a heart weakness, which may never have been apparent before, because her lines have always fallen in pleasant places. I daresay this is the first great trial she has ever been called upon to bear."

"To my knowledge it is," answered the despairing husband, "and we were married when she was nineteen."

"She has asked for you," the doctor said, "will you go up now?"

"Yes. How long, Sir Gerald?"

"She will never see another day break," the doctor said, a great pity in his voice. Then as Mr. Ford rose from his seat he held out his hand in silent sympathy. "Believe me, if I could I would save her for you, but I am powerless against such great odds."

John Ford went upstairs and softly entered the room where his wife lay dying. She turned her eyes from the daughter who sat by the bedside holding her mother's cold hand in her own soft warm one, as if she would fain impart her own vitality and warmth to the dying woman. Enid rose from her seat to allow her father to take her place. Alma

Ford looked up at the husband whose strength of mind and body had been her refuge since her happy girlhood. She seemed to draw strength from his touch as she had done through all the twenty-one years of their married life.

"There is much I want to say, my husband," she said in low clear tones, "before I go to join my darling. Ah! Do not grieve, dearest, it is only for a little while we part, even if you live far beyond life's allotted span. That is well; I want you all together," she added as Ralph Thornton entered the room. "Nurse, we would be alone, but before you go give me some stimulant to strengthen me; I have much to say."

When Nurse Lindsay had obeyed her the invalid lay for a few minutes without speaking, as if she would reserve her strength as much as possible before making a final call on it.

"Come near to me all of you," she said in soft clear tones. "John."

"Yes, dear."

"You have been thinking for a long time of going to Australia to open up new business there?"

"Yes."

"My husband, I want you to do so, and John the request I am going to make may sound strange to you. Our darling's child has no name of her own, you must give her yours. Take her to Australia

with you and let her be known as your own daughter. I am still young enough to have been her mother. It is an innocent deception and will hurt none."

John Ford looked from Ralph Thornton to his daughter in dismay. Deceit of any sort was foreign to his honorable, upright nature, and yet how could he refuse the last request of the wife who was dearer to him than life itself.

"My darling," he said, "be sure it will be well with the child. We will all take care of her."

"But John I want your promise. Ralph!"

"Yes, little mater."

"Are you willing to give your child to their keeping? Say."

Thornton took the frail fingers in his. "Yes," he said, brokenly, "I am quite willing to give my little daughter into her grandfather and aunt's keeping, knowing that I am acting for the child's everlasting good."

Alma Ford lay quite still a few minutes, but the blue eyes on which the film of death was already gathering were turned beseechingly to the husband who had never failed her, and he could not but fathom their pleading. It was not that he had any objection to leaving England; it was only on Una's account they had not gone before; but to allow Doris to sail under false colours was repugnant to him.

But still the dying eyes urged him. He bent over her and put his lips to her white ones.

"It shall be as you wish, dear," he said tenderly.

A glad light leapt into the eyes which were soon to be closed for ever, and when she spoke again her voice had gained new strength.

"Enid!"

"Yes, dear mother."

"You will promise never under any circumstances to divulge the fact that the child is not your own sister."

"Yes, mother, I promise most faithfully," the girl said firmly, "never to divulge under any circumstances that Doris is not my father's daughter. Do not fear, dear," she continued, the grey eyes blinded with tears of anguish, "I will take the greatest care of Una's daughter. I will take her mother's place."

"That is well," the dying woman murmured. "When I meet my darling I will be able to tell her all is well with the child. John, you will promise that too."

"Yes, dearest."

Ralph Thornton came forward thinking she would make a similar request to him. But her strength was fast giving out. She turned to her husband.

"John," she said faintly, "I would die in your arms, you have been so dear to me, so good. Do you remember our joy when Una was born? How I love the memory of that time now that all earthly things are fading."

Silence fell; Enid dropped on her knees and hid her face in the bed clothes. At last the courage and spirit had given way in that slim girlish body. As Alma Ford breathed her last breath in her husband's arms, Ralph Thornton lifted the girl's unconscious form and bore it from the room.

And so exactly a week after Una's death, they laid Alma Ford beside her in Earth's arms; mother and daughter slept together in God's acre, and two months later John Ford and his daughter crossed the seas to a sunny land, taking with them Ralph Thornton's infant child, who was henceforth to be known as John Ford's own daughter.

CHAPTER X.

It was early September in Australia, one of the sweetest months throughout her sunny dominions. In one of the most beautiful suburbs of Sydney was situated a many-windowed red brick mansion, standing in its own spacious grounds, which graduated in terraces covered with velvety green couch grass, and terminated at a stone wall, built to keep back the encroaching waters of Sydney Harbour. That beautiful harbour of which the sons and daughters of New South Wales are so justly proud. A row of waratah shrubs, the flower after which the mansion was named, was planted along the wall. They were in bloom now, but they were not putting forth their best efforts as they do in their bush and mountain home. They bloomed sulkily as if to show their mute protest against cultivation's trammels and the irksome unwelcome attention of the gardener; while further up the next terrace there blossomed beds of shirley and oriental poppies, carnations, sweet peas, and mignonette, in company with many other

flowers, which showed their grateful appreciation of the loving care bestowed on them by putting forth their best and sweetest blossoms.

In the orchard, the fruit trees had clothed themselves in their soft garlands of pink and white, and mother earth, arrayed in her fairest colours, fairly revelled in the sunshine of this blue and golden day.

A white banksia rose climbing over the windows of the luxuriously-furnished breakfast-room within "The Waratahs," almost thrust its trail of fragrant blossom into the room, where two people sat at breakfast, a lady of thirty summers and a noble-looking boy of nine.

Muriel Ashworth had been widowed when Leonard, her only son, was but a few months old. His father had fallen in the Boer war, when Australia had sent her troops to help the motherland. On Mrs. Ashworth's face was reflected the strength and beauty of her character. She had a tall, well-proportioned figure, with that easy grace of movement which is to be seen in so many Australians, while on her bright face there rested the charm of the strong, self-reliant personality which dominated her actions, and made her such a charming, interesting companion. She was well worth looking at as she sat at breakfast on this beautiful September morning. She was intent on studying the shipping news contained in the columns of the "Daily Telegraph," when a servant entered the room and handed her a

telegram. She tore it open, read it, and then gave voice to an exclamation of pleasure.

"Your uncle arrived at Port Adelaide last night, Leonard," she said, turning to her little son. "He is coming overland the rest of the way. This is Tuesday. He will be home on Friday, I suppose."

"Oh, how jolly," exclaimed Leonard. "Mother, may I have a holiday from school the day he arrives and go with you to meet him?"

"Perhaps, if you are good."

The boy got up from his seat to go and give his mother a vigorous hug, which she returned with interest.

Muriel Ashworth and her brother Douglas Willoughby were so much to each other. Her bright face showed the joy she felt at the prospect of seeing him again after two years' absence from Australia.

Archibald Willoughby, their father, had said good-bye to life when Douglas and Muriel were in their infancy, leaving them both well provided for, as far as the world's goods were concerned.

Their mother had been dead five years, and save for each other they had no relations who were near and dear to them, except Leonard, Mrs. Ashworth's small son, whom mother and uncle did their best to spoil.

CHAPTER XI.

"I suppose you will not be content to settle down in Australia, Douglas, after all the beautiful spots you have visited in your trip round the world," Mrs. Ashworth said, looking admiringly on the deep-chested, broad-shouldered, athletic-looking, six feet of manhood beside her. "Tell me, did the old country come up to your expectations."

Douglas Willoughby smiled down at his sister as he answered her question, a smile which found its reflection in the brown eyes so like his own in shape and colour.

"I was more than satisfied. I did not dream the world held so many beautiful spots. But," waving his hand from the balcony of the "Waratahs" where he stood towards the sunlit waters of the harbour, "I have roamed the world over, but have never seen anything more entrancing to a beauty-loving eye than that."

"Did you meet anyone you knew abroad, Douglas?"

"Oh, yes, dozens of people. By the way, Muriel, do you remember Ralph Thornton? He used to come here to play tennis."

"Ralph Thornton," Muriel repeated, rummagingly. "I seem to know the name. Was he the man with the mysterious or was it objectionable wife, a young, rather good-looking man?"

"There was nothing very mysterious about Mrs. Thornton; she was very real and substantial looking, but you ladies would have nothing to do with her; so there must have been something objectionable about her."

"I know no one would receive her," Mrs. Ashworth rejoined, "although I never heard that she was guilty of any particular transgression."

"Well," Willoughby continued, "I met Ralph Thornton in London. You cannot conceive what a change has come over him since he left Sydney eight years ago. Why, during that time he has aged twenty years. A friend of his, who was staying at the same hotel as Thornton and myself, told me that his wife had died rather suddenly two years ago and he had never looked the same since. I felt sorry for him, although I did not think the loss of a woman like Mrs. Thornton would have made such havoc of a man's life. Well, a strange thing happened. I went to the theatre the same night, and whom should I see there, blazing with jewels and

wearing a very low-cut dress of bright pink, but the very woman of whose death I had heard only that afternoon. Next day Thornton and I were having dinner at the Trocadero, when who should come in accompanied by a gay bohemian looking crowd, but Mrs. Thornton. I looked at Thornton as she came near our table, and the only recognition he gave of her presence was a tighter compression of the lips. I had almost made up my mind that I had mistaken her identity when she came up, and extended her hand to me in quite a gushing fashion. 'Do you not remember me, Mr. Willoughby?' she asked, looking at Thornton as she spoke. 'I am so glad you are cheering my husband up with your company. He is always so glad to see anyone from Australia, and he has not looked well of late. Are you making a long stay in London?' and without giving me time to answer, she had said good-bye and passed on to join her friends. There is something strange about the whole thing."

"There certainly is," Mrs. Ashworth agreed. "I always felt sorry for Mr. Thornton. It must be misery for a man of his class to be married to a woman of hers. He must have been quite a boy when they were married, and not fitted to take on his shoulders the responsibility of matrimony."

"Tell me, Douglas," leaning back in the verandah chair, and regarding his good-looking face intently, "did you meet anyone in your travels nice enough to be Mrs. Douglas Willoughby?"

"No," laughingly, "you are still first favourite, and as far as I can see are likely to remain so."

"I am very sorry to hear it. My dear Douglas, you are twenty-eight years old; it is quite time you were thinking about doing your duty to your country and posterity by taking a wife. Australia cannot afford to do without the progeny of healthy, clean-living men like yourself. Knowing your ideas about woman as well as I do, I am not afraid that you will marry anyone who is unworthy to be the mother of your children."

"No," he answered gravely, "you need not fear that. But up to the present time I have not met my ideal. Be very sure that when I do I shall lose no time in wooing her if she is free to be wooed. How beautiful they keep that garden next door, Muriel. Do the French's still live there?"

"Oh no, they sold out just after you left Sydney. Some English people bought it, a Mr. Ford and his daughter live there, or I should say his two daughters, if Doris, a baby of three, can count."

"Is there no Mrs. Ford?"

"No. I fancy she died just after Doris was born. Miss Ford told me that her little sister was only seven weeks old when her mother died."

"Oh you know them well, then?"

"Yes, very well. Enid Ford and I are going to the flower show to-morrow. Would you care to accompany us?"

"By no means, sister mine. I detest crowded flower shows, and do not know enough about horticulture to take much interest in the exhibits. I can scarcely tell you the name of a flower other than the common and garden variety. I am quite content to view the lovely things in their garden beds, not in a stuffy crowded hall."

"Oh, well," laughed Muriel, "we won't take you with us if you feel like that. What time is it, Douglas?"

"Just four o'clock." Looking at his watch.

"We must be going downstairs," Mrs. Ashworth said, rising from her seat. "I told Mary we would have afternoon tea in the summer-house. Leonard will be home from school in a few minutes."

They went downstairs to the pretty arbor where a cream-climbing rose and wisteria met and embraced over its trellised roof and side.

"Why, whom have you got there, Leonard," asked his uncle coming into the pretty summer-house and finding Leonard with a little white robed maiden of three beside him. "Is it a fairy?"

"A very substantial fairy, are you not, Doris?" laughed Muriel. "Come here, dear, and shake hands with Leonard's uncle."

The child came forward without the slightest hesitation or the least trace of shyness and held out her dimpled hand, while she put the other hand on Willoughby's knee, and looked at him confidently.

"Is you Lenie's Uncle," asked the small maid regarding him with wide-open blue eyes. "Was you in the big boat?"

"Yes," he answered, lifting her on to his knee (Douglas Willoughby was fond of all children); "I came all the way across the big sea to Leonard and his mother."

"They my Lenie, my mother."

"Oh, indeed; then since they are relations of yours, little one, I think you will have to adopt me too. Tell me," looking quizzingly into the child's beautiful face, a smile on his lips, "will you have me for an uncle?"

"Yes, I will love you, too, if you be good," turning and putting her dimpled arms round his neck, while she pressed her rosy lips to his bronzed cheek, an action that caused Muriel and her brother to laugh outright. Leonard had gone out on the lawn, but came running back as his mother called him.

"Yes, mother."

"I want you to go in next door and tell Miss Ford we are waiting for her. She promised to come and have tea with us this afternoon."

"Very well, mother. Are you coming, Doris?"

The child slipped off Willoughby's knee, and both children scampered off, Doris' golden curls flying in the breeze.

"What a beautiful little girl, Muriel. Is the other sister anything like that?" asked Willoughby.

"Yes, except that the colour of the hair and eyes are different. They are strikingly alike."

"Is the other sister as beautiful?"

"More so."

"I wonder," looking at his sister mischievously, "whether she will give me as warm a welcome as the little one. If, as you say, she is as lovely, I should have no objection."

"Don't be absurd, Douglas; Enid Ford is twenty-one."

"Just the age I like," he rejoined laughingly.

"Well," smiling at his nonsense, "you can judge for yourself. Here she comes across the lawn now."

He looked through the rose-wreathed door of the arbor and saw Enid Ford coming towards them, with little Doris clinging to her hand and Leonard beside her.

CHAPTER XII.

There are some incidents in our lives which leave an impression on the tablets of our memory. Some pictures we carry in our mind's eye the whole of our earthly sojourn, and the picture that Douglas Willoughby saw on that September afternoon remained with him through all time.

She had paused to admire a bed of phlox, their many varied and vivid tints blending with the softer colours. Her lissom, slender, girlish figure was clad in a soft white lace trimmed dress which fell in graceful folds on to the velvety sward at her feet. Around her supple waist she wore a white silk empire belt; her beautiful form was unconfined by any disfiguring compass of steel or whalebone.

There was a bounding grace of movement in every step she took, which can only be attained when every limb is free. Her brown head was uncovered, for in September the sun after 4 o'clock has no power to search and burn as he does later

on in the year. Every thread of gold which ran through the crisp curling hair was brightened by the sunbeams that strayed amid her brown tresses.

She came on towards the summer-house with both children beside her, quite unconscious of the admiring glance that followed her every movement.

Douglas Willoughby's brown eyes looked into her dark grey orbs for the space of a moment as his sister introduced them. He noted, with quite a new feeling at his heart, her many charms, but it was not altogether her beauty which made his heart beat faster. She had that magnetic attraction which belongs to some women, not always the most beautiful ones either.

"Little Doris is very like you, Miss Ford," Willoughby said, some minutes later, looking at the child who was leaning against Enid's white figure; "I should have known at once you were sisters."

"Yes, there is a family likeness, I suppose, but Doris is fair like her mother; I resemble my father, my eyes being the same colour as his."

"And beautiful eyes they are," was his unspoken thought. "I wonder how they would look if she were angry, or looking love into other eyes. I am sure they would have a wonderful beauty if they were moved by any emotion, they are so lovely in repose."

"Douglas, you told me you were positively famishing for your tea, and there you have let it get

stone cold. Let me give you another cup," Muriel's voice broke in.

"No, I like it cold"—raising the cup to his lips and drinking it off in one draught.

Muriel smiled but made no comment; she knew her brother's pet aversion was a lukewarm cup of tea.

"Enid, you have not forgotten we are going to the flower show to-morrow?" Mrs. Ashworth said. "I believe the daffodils this year are lovely."

"I am not likely to forget anything so delightful as a flower show. What time do we start?"

"Early after lunch," replied Muriel; "we must be there for the opening ceremony."

"What time does it open?" asked Willoughby.

"Three o'clock."

"Well, we had better leave here about two thirty; that will give us plenty of time," said Willoughby.

"Are you going, Douglas?"

"Of course. I adore flower shows, you know that," with an imploring glance at his sister to make no comment on his change of front.

Muriel watched him with rather an amused look in her brown eyes, as he sat talking animatedly to Enid Ford. During the last half hour, his sister thought in her own mind, he had developed a taste for two things he could not bear before, cold tea and crowded flower shows.

"I must be going now," Enid said, when five o'clock came; "it is getting late. Come, Doris."

"It is early yet," Willoughby said with a glance at Muriel that plainly said, "Ask her to stay to dinner."

"What is your hurry, Enid?" Mrs. Ashworth said. "Why not stay and have dinner with us?"

"I never or very rarely go out to dinner," Enid answered. "I like to be there to welcome my father when he comes home in the evening."

"Why not persuade your father to come in and have dinner with us, Miss Ford?" interposed Willoughby.

"No, I thank you, not this evening."

"Well," Muriel said, obeying the unspoken request in her brother's eyes, "will you be at home this evening, Enid?"

"Yes, dear, and we will be delighted to see you if you and your brother will come in. He can have a game of cards, if you play," turning to the young man, "or some music if you like that."

"Oh, music by all means. I am not much of a hand at cards. Let me walk with you to your gate, Miss Ford, and see you safely in."

Muriel Ashworth watched them till they were out of sight, her stalwart brother and the beautiful girl beside him with the child clinging to her hand, and then she laughed outright, a low laugh of amusement.

"Well I never," she ejaculated, "of all the bare-faced storytellers. Not much of a hand at cards, your favourite amusement. Fond of music when you don't know one note from another. My dear brother, during the last hour your tastes of a life time have undergone a complete change; music, flower shows, cold tea. I suppose you will be developing a taste for gardening next, that is Enid's favourite hobby."

As she turned to retrace her steps towards the house she met the object of her thoughts coming to meet her with rather a guilty look on his frank, open countenance. He took her by the shoulders and gave her an affectionate kiss.

"Really, Muriel, you are a brick. A favourite motto of mine is 'silence is golden.'"

"How your ideas do change. You told me the other day you could not stand people who had not the courage of their opinions."

"That was the other day. To-day is——"

"The tenth of September," broke in Muriel, "be sure you make a note of it."

"I will," he responded, linking his arm affectionately through hers, "for to-day I have discovered that I have a sister as discreet as she is charming to look at."

CHAPTER XIII.

"Mrs. Ashworth and her brother are coming in this evening, father," Enid said, as Mr. Ford came into the pretty drawing-room with Doris in his arms.

"Are tney, dear? That will be nice. Say good-night to Enid, darling," he said to the sleepy child, "and then I will carry my pet upstairs to bed."

"I can see the dust man is coming," Enid said, kissing the sweet lips of the child she so dearly loved. "When Mary has undressed you and put you in your little bed I will come up and tuck you in, darling."

When her father had gone upstairs with the child in his arms Enid moved about the pretty drawing-room, putting some fresh roses in the tall specimen glasses. Somehow she felt that she would like tne room to look particularly nice to-night, and when she had finished it certainly looked a lovely and charming apartment.

It was a long room which ran the whole length of the front hall. The windows looked out on an exquisite garden and beautifully kept lawn, and wide French doors opened on to a beautiful conservatory, where baskets of maidenhair and lace fern hung from the glass roof. Pots of beautiful cyclamens and primulas were in evidence, while many coloured cinerarias held up their lovely heads of marquerette like blossoms; and ferns of every description gave a relief to the gay flowering plants with their soft green foliage. A tiny fountain threw its spray over the whole when it was in play, but at present it was not throwing upwards its silver shower. It reserved its force until the warm, sultry weather when the lovely inmates of the greenhouse would continually need its administrations.

The drawing-room was altogether a cool and dainty apartment, and seemed a fitting shrine for the beautiful white robed girl who rose from the piano stool to welcome Douglas Willoughby and his sister when they came into her presence.

"My father will be here in a few minutes. He has taken Doris upstairs," she said. "Oh, here he is. Mr. Willoughby, Father."

Douglas Willoughby and Mr. Ford shook hands. The young man looked admiringly at Enid's father; he was as tall and broad shouldered as himself, although the elasticity of youth had departed. Enid looked quite small beside him, although she was

just above medium height. Mr. Ford and Willoughby were soon chatting on different subjects, each interested in the other's conversation.

"I must go and say a last good night to Doris if you will excuse me, Mr. Willoughby. Will you come with me, Muriel?" Enid said.

"I suppose you are quite pleased to be home again, Mr. Willoughby," Mr. Ford observed when the two men were alone.

"Yes. There is no place like home, although I enjoyed my trip so well that I stayed away a few months longer than I intended."

"That is where you feel the benefit of not being tied to business. Your time is your own."

"Well, for that matter I am a very busy man. I have an interest in a great many concerns in Sydney. I am very interested in the Newcastle coal mines and hold a good number of shares. Then there are the stations that belong jointly to my sister and myself, which require my personal attention sometimes. In fact I ought to go on a tour of inspection at once, but I cannot tear myself away from Sydney while the weather is so beautiful."

Willoughby had made up his mind only that morning that he would go north in a day or two, but since meeting Enid Ford he had altered his mind. He felt he must see more of his lovely neighbour and get to know her better before leaving Sydney.

"The ladies are staying upstairs a long time," remarked Mr. Ford; "they cannot be saying good

night to Doris; the child was asleep before I left her."

"How fond Miss Ford is of her little sister," said Willoughby.

"Yes. She has been as a mother to her. My wife died when the baby was only seven weeks old."

Willoughby noticed an undercurrent of sadness in the elder man's voice and watched his eyes stray to where, over the mantelpiece, hung Alma Ford's photograph taken just before Doris' birth.

"You have been two years in Australia, Mr. Ford, have you not?" he asked.

"Three," corrected Mr. Ford; "we spent the first year in Melbourne. I opened a new warehouse there, and having seen it well on its feet I came on to Sydney to do likewise. I spend my time between Melbourne and Sydney, but our residence is here. We had been considering the advisability of opening in Australia ever since the colonies federated, but we did not care to tear ourselves away from old associations. When my wife died I was glad for Enid's sake to seek consolation amid new scenes. She was prostrate with grief for weeks after the death of her mother, who was only forty when she died, ten years younger than myself. I think the call the helpless little baby made on her love and care comforted Enid and was a solace to her in her bitter grief."

There was silence for a few minutes while Willoughby looked his sympathy. Mr. Ford caught the

glance; he rose suddenly standing with his back to the light.

"I am a nice sort of host," he remarked, "inflicting my troubles on you, but we have heard of you so often from your sister and her boy that somehow I do not feel that you are a stranger and that we have met for the first time to-night."

"And favourably, I hope, Mr. Ford," smiled Willoughby, hoping that "we" meant Enid too.

"Oh favourably of course," laughed Mr. Ford, "since we heard of you from the people who love you best, and love is blind you know. Why here are the truants in the conservatory. They must have come through the door that leads on to the verandah."

"We did," said Muriel, coming forward. Enid wanted to show me her staghorns, which are hanging outside. I don't know why Enid always seems to get her plants to grow so beautifully when mine only do fairly well."

"She is so fond of them," Mr. Ford said, "are you not, dear?" putting his arm round the girl's slim waist as she came nearer to him. "I am sure I wonder that the gardener has not given notice long ago. He is called to account if one plant is forgotten."

"Well," broke in Willoughby, "the garden certainly shows the care it gets. I have been admiring it from the balcony ever since I came home four days ago."

"Are you fond of a garden, Mr. Willoughby?" asked Enid.

"Yes. I take the greatest interest in all matters horticultural. In fact gardening is a hobby of mine," avoiding Muriel's eyes as he spoke.

"Oh, well you must see my bush house; it is looking lovely just now."

"I should be delighted. Will we go now?"

"Oh, no, not now," smiled Miss Ford, "it is too dark to see it, but I should be so pleased if Muriel, Leonard and yourself will come and have afternoon tea with me there the day after to-morrow."

"The day after to-morrow! Why not to-morrow, Miss Ford?"

"We are going to the flower show to-morrow."

"Oh, yes, of course." Then after a pause, "Muriel and I are going to see 'Brewster's Millions' to-morrow night. Will you do us the honour of coming with us. We will take the greatest care of Miss Ford," he continued, turning to her father, "if you will entrust her to us."

"I am sure you will," Mr. Ford said smiling "Would you like to go, darling?"

"I cannot to-morrow night," Enid replied, "Mrs. Brison and her son are coming in for a game of bridge."

CHAPTER XIV.

"Muriel," Douglas Willoughby asked, as soon as they were outside Mr. Ford's gate, "who are the Brisons?"

"Eric Brison, I suppose that is whom you are most interested in, is a barrister," Muriel answered.

"Oh, I know; he and I used to go to school together."

"Yes, the same."

"Does he often go to visit Miss Ford?"

Mrs. Ashworth turned her laughing eyes on her brother's anxious face as they came into the "Wara-tahs." "Really Douglas, I never knew you to be curious about other people's business before, but you have developed so many new traits since lunch to-day, amongst them mendacity, that I am not surprised at anything you do and say now. Are you in love, Douglas?"

"Yes."

Muriel looked up smilingly at the grave rather anxious looking young man beside her as the monosyllable fell from his lips. "And you want to know whether anyone else has forestalled you in Enid Ford's favour?"

"Yes."

"Well, although I am her dearest friend I cannot give you the information you desire. Enid is quite different from other girls her age, you know. The sons of Australia are neither so good or so cold as not to be tempted by beauty or gold," Mrs. Ashworth said, altering the poet's lines to convey her meaning. "I know that Eric Brison and one or two other men in equally good positions are in love with Enid Ford, but beyond being friendly and gracious to them, even as she is to you, I have never seen anything to give me an idea that she cares for one more than the other. She is grave beyond her years. I have seen the shadow in her expressive eyes more than once when that beautiful little sister of hers has come to offer her a caress or climb into her arms. I think her mother's death has left a great sorrow which will take a long time to heal."

"I suppose Mrs. Ford never got over the birth of her baby," said Willoughby.

"I suppose not."

"Were there any other children?"

"No. I asked Mr. Ford one day if there had been any lost in infancy. I was sorry I did immediately I saw the effect of my thoughtless words. His voice was quite husky when he answered that two daughters were the only children they had been blessed with. I suppose he was thinking of what the birth of the youngest child had cost him."

"He is fond of the little one?" Willoughby said inquiringly.

"Yes. They are both passionately fond of the child. She is the pet and darling of the household of the Ford's."

CHAPTER XV.

The flower show was thronged with a fashionably dressed assembly. Douglas Willoughby, looking his best in frock coat and silk hat, assisted Muriel to alight from the motor which had conveyed them to the Town Hall, and then turned to Enid. For a second her small gloved hand rested in his own as the girl stepped lightly to the pavement. But even for that brief moment when hand touched hand, a magnetic attraction dominated both. Enid's cheeks were slightly more flushed than usual when she turned to follow Muriel into the scented sweetness of the great hall. On the threshold she paused, drinking in with rapture the loveliness of the scene before her.

On entering, a prettily arranged group of palms, perfect in shape and health, gave a refreshing welcome to the visitor, while every flower that beautiful New South Wales can produce was there in unstinted measure. The sunlight glancing

through the open window shone on the beauty of the rose, the purity of the lily, and the rare, exquisite blossoms which were arranged so that their beauty could be seen to the best advantage. It was a sight that would have compared favourably with any flower show the wide world over. Enid Ford, who was an ardent lover of the sweet things which bountiful nature had provided to enthrall the senses, and delight the eyes of rich and poor alike, gazed round her with rapture.

"How lovely," she exclaimed, almost under her breath. "I did not think so much beauty could be gathered together in one season. You ought to be proud of your country, Muriel, when her soil and climate can give you this."

"We are," Muriel's brother answered at her side, "but you must come and see the native flowers, Miss Ford, on that table over there," leading her away from a magnificent display of orchids.

"How beautiful those flannel flowers are, Mr. Willoughby. I bought some from one of the flower sellers in Moore Street near the Post Office one day. It was the first time I had seen them. I thought they were one of the loveliest, softest flowers I had ever had in my hand with their pure velvety petals just tipped with green at their extreme edge. They are a lovely lot of flowers altogether," looking admiringly at the native blooms before she turned away to another table. "And peonies," she exclaimed in delighted surprise. "These are the first I

have seen since I left England." A shadow fell over the brilliancy of her face for just one moment, as she remembered the masses of lovely soft, silky flowers she had last seen in Una's garden, a shadow which Willoughby was quick to notice.

A moment later Enid stood with admiring eyes fixed on a group of pink and white mamon cochet roses.

"That one," Willoughby said, pointing to a beautiful half opened white rose, "reminds me of you."

"Of me. Why?"

"It is so purely white with just that faint blush of its outer leaves."

But it was not a faint blush which stained Enid's fair face as she glanced in surprise at the audacious young man, but a vivid crimson. Already Enid Ford was beginning to learn the lesson without which no woman's life can be complete.

"I thought you told me," turning laughingly to Muriel to hide her confusion, "that your brother never wasted his time paying idle compliments or talking nonsense."

"Please forgive me, Enid. I did tell you that before he came home, but he has altered in so many ways I hardly know him myself. Are you not going to ask us to have some tea, Douglas?"

Douglas Willoughby had few peers in the art of wooing. He set about winning Enid Ford's heart

during the ensuing weeks with a passionate persuasiveness that seemed to carry all before it. A woman of Enid's nature will yield more easily to the spell of strength than her less ardent sister when she loves. During the next two months, Douglas Willoughby's pertinacious wooing, his insistent attention, together with his attractive personality, gradually found response in the maiden's heart until the day came when even as the rose droops before the sun's too ardent caresses, Enid's eyes drooped before the passion in his own. And seeing this, Willoughby with glad exultation made up his mind that at the first opportunity he would tell her of his love and win from her the sweet assurance of hers.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Fernly" was the name of Mr. Ford's residence, named so by the people who built it and left unchanged by the people who had bought it.

One day in October Douglas Willoughby came into the beautiful garden in search of its fair mistress and found Doris playing with a pretty long-haired spaniel, who was scampering across the lawn after a ball, thrown by the little girl to the accompaniment of shrill, childish laughter. On catching sight of Mr. Willoughby Doris instantly transferred her attention to that gentleman.

"Hello, Uncle, how are you?" (Doris always called people by the names she heard them addressed by, and to her he was uncle, as he was to Leonard.)

"Quite well, little one," answered Willoughby, catching the child up in his strong arms. "Where is your sister?"

"In the bush house,"

"Well, suppose you stay here and eat these chocolates while I go and see how she is."

"I sit here and give Scamp some too," the child said looking at the dog who was wagging his tail expectantly while Doris broke the pink ribbon that encircled the box of sweets.

Willoughby went on towards the bush house with quick strides and a heavily beating heart. He could see the girlish figure through the trellised side of the shade house before he got there, and a nervousness quite foreign to his nature, took possession of him. Suppose she should refuse him, suppose—but what need to torture himself with doubts. In another minute he was standing beside her with hat uplifted and right hand outstretched.

"I cannot shake hands," the girl said, her eyes drooping before the ardent gaze of his, "my hands are all over soil. I am planting the maidenhair we got in the bush yesterday. It was so good of you, Mr. Willoughby, to get the roots out of the ground firm and unbroken. They are so much easier to plant."

"A goodness you repaid by taking care that I should not have your company for a single minute without a third person being present."

"I did not know you wanted my company alone."

"Would you have given it if you had known?"

"I don't know," she faltered, longing to escape the compelling gaze of those determined brown

eyes, although she felt the intoxication of his proximity: as soon as she had seen him enter the bush house she mentally divined his errand. He had come to ask her to be his wife; he was about to shatter the sweet silence she would fain have kept a little longer. Frightened, trembling, yet rapturously happy at his compelling, magnetic, masterful presence, she stood there silent with downcast eyes, avoiding looking into the brown ones, which she knew were darkened now by a passionate all-absorbing love for herself. He came nearer to her, so near that she was afraid he would hear her quickly beating heart.

"Are you going to shake hands with me," he demanded. "I do not mind the soil."

And when she did put out her soft white hand he caught its fair mate also in his strong clasp.

"Enid," he said, "you know that I love you, do you not?"

"Yes," she answered tremulously.

"Then tell me, sweet, what my answer is to be when I ask you to be my wife?"

No answer came from the trembling girl, although she did not take away the little soil-stained hands.

"Enid, look at me," he said, commandingly.

She shook her head in the negative. She could not speak, nor could she find courage to raise those heavily fringed lids.

"My darling," he said as he released the small

hands and took her graceful plant form in his strong arms, "you do love me, do you not?"

"Yes," she breathed.

He was silent for a few minutes, pressing her closer to his heart while he bent his lips to the brown head that had found a resting place against his shoulder.

"Enid," he murmured in low, passionate accents, "how soon are you going to give me your lips?"

He gently raised the lovely face as he spoke and pressed a passionate kiss on the soft mouth, a caress that thrilled the girl and awoke the love into full force within her.

"You have not told me yet that you will be my wife," he said a few minutes later.

"You have not asked me yet."

"Miss Ford, will you be my wife?"

"Yes, Mr. Willoughby."

"How soon?"

"In a year's time from now."

"A month's time you mean. Do you know that since I came into the bush house you have not looked at me once. Look up now, sweetheart."

The grey eyes were slowly raised to his. What Willoughby saw there evidently satisfied him, for he crushed the soft yielding form so closely to him that the embrace almost hurt her, and as he bent his lips to hers a sweet childish voice called: "Enid! Enid! Where you are?"

"I am here, darling," releasing herself from her lover's embrace, and holding out her arms for the child's white clad figure. "Why, what a dirty little girl you are. What have you been eating? You are all sticky." For the child's dress, between the chocolate-stained little fingers being wiped downwards and the dog being hugged against the moist dress, was anything but fresh and clean looking.

"I was been eating chocolates, me and Scamp. Uncle bringed us a boxful."

"Well, I think he is a very naughty uncle," Enid smiled, "to bring my little girl a bribe to keep her occupied for a time and spoil her digestion."

Willoughby looked at the lovely girl sitting on the rustic seat with the child in her arms, her cheeks flushed with happiness, her eyes bright and lovelit as they met his glance.

"How dearly you love that child, Enid," he said as he seated himself beside her.

"Yes," she answered, pressing the little form closer to her while her lips caressed the golden hair, "I have loved her from the moment of her birth."

He noticed that a tinge of sadness crept into her voice as it always did when she spoke of her love for Doris, for the double tragedy of the untimely death of her mother and sister which had given the helpless babe to her care, had left a wound that would take a long time to heal.

The memory of that time was with her now,

and as she remembered the promise made to her dying mother, a deep palor came over her face, chasing the flush of joy from it; her lover, quick to notice every expression of the face so dear to him, knew that her thoughts had strayed back to the past and the sorrow connected with the child's birth, which he supposed had been the cause of Mrs. Ford's death.

"Douglas," she said suddenly looking at him, a shadow in her eyes, "I cannot leave my father and Doris. They could not do without me. If you would have me for your wife you must make your home here with us. Do you love me well enough for that?"

"I love you well enough to make any sacrifice for you, sweetheart, and that would not be a sacrifice. I would not be selfish enough to take you away from your father when I know you are the light of his life. When Doris is old enough to take your place, then we will think about a home of our own. Meanwhile your people shall be my people, your home my home."

"And my little Doris your little Doris," she smiled with glad relief in her eyes. She put the child on the ground and stood up. "Run darling," she told the little one, "and ask Mary to wash those sticky hands and that dirty little face and put a clean frock on."

The child flew away to do her bidding and the

young man turned and took his sweetheart in his arms.

"Enid," he said tenderly, "you have not told me yet of your own accord that you love me."

"But you know I do," the girl cried passionately, putting her soft white arms upwards round his neck. "I love you so dearly that if I lost you now my life would be a barren and worthless thing. Even you who love me so well cannot gauge the intensity of the love I bear you—a love that will last through all eternity."

"My darling," he cried, surprised beyond measure at this glimpse into her soul, "I am the happiest man alive. I knew you were capable of intense feeling, but I did not dare to hope that you would understand what I feel, and understanding, give me back measure for measure."

He bent his lips to hers while she clung to him, and as they stood there with the beauty of the summer morning round them, the sun's hot rays tempered by the trellised roof of the shade house, the ferns she had been planting lying neglected at their feet, they were oblivious to everything save their happiness; the world was a paradise, their dreams rose coloured, the future bright and undimmed before them.

CHAPTER XVII.

Mr. Ford paced up and down his study lost in deep thought. He knew that Douglas Willoughby would ask him for his daughter this evening, and his whole upright honourable open nature shrank from giving her to the man whom he knew to be the soul of honour without first telling Willoughby of the real parentage of Doris and the motive they had for allowing her to pass as his daughter instead of his granddaughter. He paced his study with a presaging heart.

He loved his grandchild dearly for her own sake as well as for her sweet young mother's. But his whole nature had revolted against this simple act of deceit.

"Suppose," he mused, "that in the years that are to come if he should by any chance learn the secret, would it cause a disruption of faith and belief in my little girl? Would he blame us for not making it known? I know that Willoughby is too generous

mind to let the knowledge that Una was not Ralph's wife have any weight with him, since our darling was sinless and innocent. But the fact remains—she was not his wife. I wish I could make all the facts known to him," he murmured. "But my promise to Alma must be held sacred. It is the one blot on the happiness and satisfaction I feel in giving my little girl into a good man's keeping, but my lips are sealed. Come in," as a knock sounded on the door.

Willoughby came in, closing the door after him. The two men shook hands warmly.

"Well, Willoughby," Mr. Ford began, "I know you have come to ask me for my most priceless possession."

"Yes," the young man replied eagerly. "If you will give her to me, I promise that you will never have cause to regret it."

"I am sure of that."

"And you will consent to our marriage?"

"I could not do otherwise," the elder man said, looking at the frank, open, good-looking face. "Even if I had any objection to yourself, which I have not, my daughter's happiness is too sacred to me to raise any objection to her having her heart's desire. My little girl loves you, Willoughby."

"Yes, and I return that love with compound interest."

"You will not take her away, you will make your home here?"

"Yes, if that is your wish. I am a rich man, otherwise I might object."

"I am not selfish enough to insist upon that, if the idea is repugnant to Enid and yourself. But this house is large enough for both. Our little Doris has never been separated from Enid before, and would miss her sorely. You say you are a rich man. Well, it might surprise you to know that I am wealthy too, and Enid is my sole heiress."

"How can that be when you have two daughters?"

Mr. Ford got up from his seat before replying, and stood so that the light was behind him.

"Doris is an heiress too," he said slowly. "A relation of hers and someone who dearly loved her mother has endowed her with a large fortune, which I hold in trust for her, and by the time the little one comes of age, she will be a rich woman, so that she will not need anything from me, and——"

The handle of the door being hastily turned checked whatever Mr. Ford would have said, and a tempestuous little figure, clad in a long white night dress that reached to her bare dimpled feet, came running in. She rushed up to Mr. Ford, holding her rounded arms to be taken up.

"Take Doris up quick and cuddle me, farder. Nurse says I am to go to bed and I want you to put me asleep."

As the dimpled arms were stretched upward to clasp Mr. Ford's neck, the loose sleeve fell back

almost to the shoulder, revealing a little black heart-shaped mark resembling a large mole, just above the elbow on the left arm.

"Why, what a peculiar mark that is on Doris's arm," Willoughby exclaimed, coming over to examine it more closely.

"Why, Doris, you wear your heart on your sleeve, you minx."

"Under her sleeve," corrected Mr. Ford. "That is a birth mark. All the Fords for generations past have been branded with this. Both my daughters were born with it. See, I have one here on my wrist," pulling up his shirt cuff to display a mark that was the exact facsimile of the one on the child's left arm. "Now, my pet, say good-night to uncle and I will carry you upstairs to bed. If you do not care to wait here for me till I come back, Willoughby, you will find Enid in the drawing-room."

CHAPTER XVIII.

Enid sat at the piano, softly playing a dreamy lullaby when Willoughby entered and stood for a moment to admire the pretty picture before him. The softly shaded electric light threw a rosy glow over the beautiful room and its occupant.

The silvery spray of the fountain in motion in the conservatory seemed a fitting accompaniment to the soft dreamy music.

She did not turn her head when her lover entered, although she was conscious of his presence there, but her heart beat much faster and the music was not so smoothly rendered. She did not move until she found herself lifted up from the piano stool into his arms.

"I have seen your father," Willoughby said, lifting his lips from hers, "and he has consented to give me his greatest treasure, and soon."

"How soon?"

"As soon as I wish, so that will be to-morrow. Will that suit your ladyship?"

"Not at all; I have heaps of things I want to do before I am ready to be Mrs. Willoughby."

"What things?"

"See about my trousseau, for one."

"You can do all that in a week. My darling, you will not keep me waiting long; this is the twentieth of October. What about a month from now?"

"I could not be married before Christmas, Douglas."

"Why not?"

"I don't want to leave my father alone for Christmas, and Doris would miss me dreadfully on Christmas Eve. She is to have a little party in the afternoon and a Christmas tree."

"Very well, sweetheart, I will wait till New Year's Eve. Where would you like to spend your honeymoon? Will we take a trip home and visit the scenes of your childhood?"

"No," she answered, all the warm colour falling away from her face, "not there."

"I should have thought you would have liked that dear," he said gently. "Because you have suffered there you must not stay away for ever from the land of your birth. You would find a balm for the wound your mother's death caused you, if you could bring yourself to visit the places and people

she lived amongst. There is no place in the world I would rather take you to than England."

"I am quite content with Australia," Enid said. "When Doris is older we will go home, not now, Douglas."

She was trembling and pale as she turned to her lover, hiding her face on his breast and clinging to him as if she would draw comfort from the contact of his strong well-knit frame.

"Very well, my darling," he answered, pressing her supple, pliant figure closer to his heart. "Australia it shall be. Our sunny land has not the rural beauty of England with her soft green woods and valleys and the peace that always seems to brood over her. But she has grandeur and beauty of her own. Have you been to the Blue Mountains?"

"No."

"Well, we will go there. Muriel has a pretty little cottage at Katoomba, an elderly couple who were with us in our mother's time have charge of it. The wife is a good cook, so we will not be starved or poisoned. Or we could go to the Hydro Majestic, Medlow Bath, whichever you prefer."

"I think I should prefer Katoomba," Enid said, all the lovely colour coming back into her face, the light to her eyes, "because I—I should have you all to myself there."

CHAPTER XIX.

"Come out, come out, my dearest dear,
Come out and greet the sun,"

sang Douglas Willoughby, coming into the room where Enid lay drowsily on her pillows.

"The sun," sleepily murmured his wife, "I am always trying to get away from it."

"Well, so you shall," putting a smooth, freshly shaved cheek against her rosy sleep flushed one. "If your ladyship will condescend to get up and have breakfast with me, I will take you down the glens, and in their shady coolness you will forget it is mid-summer."

"Very well, I will have my bath and dress at once. How long have you been up, Douglas?"

"Since six o'clock."

"What is the time now?"

"Half-past seven."

"How energetic you are, Douglas. Where have you been?"

"I have been to get last night's "Evening News" and "Australian Star," which I will read on the verandah until you are ready for breakfast. But do not be long; I am as hungry as a hunter."

Two hours later Willoughby and his bride of three days had left the pretty vine clad cottage and were making their way towards one of the glens.

"How well you look, Mrs. Willoughby, and how sweet in that pretty white dress," her husband remarked. "I have not seen it before."

"No," she answered, "it is a little bit old fashioned for town. I have had this dress for nearly four years."

"Old fashioned, is it? I should not have thought so. I like that pretty embroidery," caressingly touching the sleeve nearest to him. "I hope you will wear it often; it suits you," looking with love and admiration on the lovely girl beside him. During the last few months she had gained new beauty; love the beautifier was doing its inevitable work. Enid had grown to a perfection of womanly charm. Her splendid vitality seemed to suffuse her with a captivating radiance, her contours had grown more beautifully rounded, yet without any sacrifice of elegance. The dress that had elicited her husband's admiration was one of the white dresses which both Mrs. Ford's daughters had worn

on the morning of the day that had ended so sadly for them all. The day on which Death had come to Ralph Thornton's house to claim for his victim a fair young mother in the very spring time of her life, a tragic event that had left a shadow on her fair young sister's life; the one cloud on the horizon of her perfect happiness in her husband's love lay in the knowledge that a secret was between them. Even as she walked beside him now, the memory of that time was with her.

"Here is the echo tree," Willoughby said, stopping beside a dilapidated old tree, and in the absurd nonsense of throwing their voices across the gorge and hearing it echoed back from the other side, Enid forgot all about the momentary cloud that had rested on her heart a few minutes earlier.

"Tell me," Willoughby said, stopping at the top of the wooden steps leading to the glen, "tell me what you think of that."

"Of that? Oh, Douglas, I did not think such beauty existed outside of paradise."

And truly it was a lovely sight on which their admiring gaze rested. Approaching for the first time one of the many glens nestling in the heart of the Blue Mountains, the tourist is lost in admiration at the sight spread out before him. In every crevice that perforates the mountain side the native ferns threw out their graceful feathery fronds, while tree ferns of both tall and dwarf variety grow where ever they can find the slightest footing.

Many refreshing streams ripple gently down the mountain side, nourishing and giving life to the verdant growth with which the glen abounds; while numerous silvery waterfalls give a charming and fairy-like vista of loveliness to the whole, almost reminding one of some enchanted region, seen only in dreams, and too beautiful for mortals to inhabit.

Enid and her husband descended the wooden steps placed there for the convenience of tourists. The girl spoke but little, but in the depths of her luminous eyes the delight of high-souled joy in the beautiful scene before her was plainly visible. A sweet silence fell between husband and wife. Willoughby understood what was passing in Enid's mind as they slowly made their way to the bottom of the glen. He watched her grey eyes wander from one beauty to another as they paused on each plateau, until they reached the bottom of the glen, where in the glancing golden sunshine the Bridal Veil Falls throws its silvery gleaming tulle streamered-like spray on to the rock beneath.

"Well, Enid," her husband said, putting his arm round her white-robed figure to draw her closer to his side (there was no one in sight at that moment), "does that satisfy you?"

"It does, indeed; I have never seen anything like it before. You know I had never been out of Great Britain when we left England, and had left school only a few months when we sailed for Australia."

"Well, then, my darling, it remains for me, an Australian to show one of Britain's fair daughters the world's beauty spots. In a few years' time, when you can tear yourself away from your father and Doris, I will take you for a trip round the world, and I will show you places that are as fair as this, but not more beautiful."

"You could not show me anything more beautiful, that would be impossible," she replied, starting away from his encircling arm as a party of picnickers came in sight.

"We will rest here for a little while and then go and see a pretty spot called 'The Amphitheatre, on the other side of the mountain,'" Willoughby said.

"Let us go now," the girl cried eagerly, "I am not in the least tired."

"Very well, come along sweetheart," smiling down at the lovely interested face. "It is not far away."

When they arrived at the spot mentioned, Enid stood entranced. A crescented wall that nature had delved in the mountain's side, resembled nothing so much as the half circle of a theatre's auditorium. Beautiful feathery ferns of varied description growing on every rock and projection of the roughened wall, looked lovingly down on the almost regular group of tree ferns that filled the space below.

"No wonder it was called the Amphitheatre," Enid exclaimed; "they could not have given it a more appropriate name."

A woman who had been standing near them dressed in a nurse's uniform, turned at the sound of Enid's voice, and as their eyes met a glance of recognition flashed into the stranger's face.

"Miss Ford!" she exclaimed, coming forward, "the world is a small place after all. Do you not remember me?"

"I cannot remember who you are," Enid answered, "although I know your face quite well."

"I am Nurse Lindsay."

"Nurse Lindsay," repeated the girl, every vestige of colour leaving her face. "Yes, I remember, you are——"

"The nurse who attended your mother in her last illness."

"Yes. Are you visiting Australia?"

"I am here permanently. I came to Sydney to be near my daughter. That is her over there," indicating a young woman standing a few paces off. "How is your father, Miss Ford, and the baby?"

"Both quite well, thank you," Enid replied in a fever to get away from her unwelcome visitor. "I will say goodbye," she continued, fearful lest this woman should prolong the conversation.

She turned away with an abruptness so unlike

her usual gracious manner that her husband looked at her in surprise.

"We will go further on, Douglas," she said, trying to smile up at him and failing perceptibly in the attempt. "Have you any more beauty spots to show me?"

"We will go home now, my darling, it will be lunch time when we get there, and we have unlimited time at our disposal to see all the beauty of the mountains.

"Yes," she assented quickly, "we can see them another time."

They went the nearest way back to the pretty cottage. Enid climbed the many steps with almost feverish haste. When they reached home she astonished her husband by sinking into the nearest chair and bursting into a flood of tears.

"My little wife," said Willoughby, drawing her upwards to rest in his arms and weep out her grief on his breast. "You must try and get over the very natural grief your mother's death caused you, sweetheart; she would be the last one to wish your every joy to be marred because she said goodbye to life before the burden of many years fell upon her. My dear one, you cannot live with the dead."

He held her in his arms, soothing her with the gentleness of a mother, pressing soft kisses on her quivering lips, until she rested exhausted but comforted in his embrace.

He did not dream that any graver cause of trouble existed other than that he had mentioned. Did not know that her perfect happiness was clouded because her past held a secret that she could not share with him.

The rest of the honeymoon passed like a dream to Douglas and Enid Willoughby in the consummation of the most idyllic love God had ever let any of his creatures know. When they returned to Sydney Mr. Ford held in his arms with a thankful heart the daughter who was so dear to him, scanning her lovely radiant face with satisfied eyes, and so the happy months sped on until it was October again.

CHAPTER XX.

"What time does your train go, Douglas?"

"Nine o'clock from the Central. By Jove, I shall have to hurry, it is after eight now."

"You will be home, when?"

"To-morrow some time, darling. You can expect me early. Be very sure I shall not stay away a moment longer than I can help. I am not tired of my little wife's company yet. I will not get to Newcastle till noon; and I want to see Clark, the manager of the mine, before the shareholders meet this evening."

"Thank you," to the servant who had just brought in the morning post.

Enid Willoughby opened her letter and a shadow fell over the radiance of the face.

"A letter from your father, I see, dear," her husband observed. "No bad news, I trust."

"No. But he says he will not return from Melbourne till Christmas Eve, two months hence. I had hoped he would be back next month at the latest."

"Well, never mind, little wife, you have Doris and Muriel with you, to say nothing of my unworthy self," Willoughby responded, rising from the breakfast-table holding out his arms for Enid's white-robed figure.

"Goodbye, sweetheart," he said, "take care of yourself. You are always precious to me, but doubly so just now. You will not be lonely, dear one. Muriel is coming to sleep here to-night. I must go now," pressing her closer for a last embrace, "I shall just have time to say good-bye to my large sister-in-law."

He caught the child up in his arms when she came running in, in answer to Enid's call.

"Good-bye, little one, take care of Enid, and do not let her be lonely while uncle is away."

"I take her to see Lennie and Mother," Doris responded, giving him a vigorous hug round the neck.

"That's a good girl," he replied, putting the child down. "Now, my darling, one last kiss and I must be off."

He caught up his hat and ran quickly out to the waiting motor, turning for a last look at his wife as the car started off.

Enid went back into the breakfast room and taking her father's letter from the envelope read it through again.

"My little girl," he wrote, "I find that there are so many matters requiring my personal attention in Melbourne that it is almost certain I will not return to Sydney until Christmas Eve. I received by the last English mail a letter from Ralph. He requests me to send him one or more of the photographs of Una taken on the morning of the day we lost our darling. You will find the packet containing the photographs in a bottom drawer of the cabinet in my study. Select what you think he would like best and post before Tuesday to his house at Richmond. I am mailing under separate cover the key of the cabinet.

"Give my best regards to Douglas and his sister. Kiss Doris for me and give her my fondest love, and accept the same yourself, darling, from your affectionate father, John Ford."

Enid looked among the other letters brought by the mail. As yet the key had not come to hand with which to open the cabinet in her father's study.

"Perhaps," she mused, "it will come by the mid-day post. I did not know father had those photographs. I do not remember having seen any of them."

The key arrived by the midday post, and

when Doris was having her afternoon sleep Enid went to her father's study. When she had opened the drawer she lifted from it a bulky packet addressed to "Mrs. Ford, care of Mr. Thornton, Richmond." She brushed the tears from her long lashes when half a dozen photographs lay on the table before her.

The first she took in her hand was one of Una and herself standing side by side, the velvet lawn at their feet, the rose wreathed arbor making a pretty background for the picture.

"How alike we were," the girl mused, "only that the hair is differently arranged, I would not know one from the other."

The second picture on which her glance rested was one of Una sitting alone on the lawn, nurturing in nature's own fashion the infant at her breast, the wonderful mother love portrayed in the lovely smiling lips and eyes. Enid looked on the photograph for the first time through a blinding mist of tears. It appealed to all that was womanly and tender in the heart of the girl who was so soon to be a mother herself. Una had so loved the baby and yet the dread angel of death had called her away.

Some lines she had learned at school flashed through Enid's mind, as something that has moved us often does in moments of emotion. It told how

the dread angel had spared a young mother in the following lines:

“And must thou leave thy tender babe
To want a mother’s care,
Who morn and evening at thy knee
Lisps out her simple prayer.

No, Heaven, in bounteous mercy rich
Will spare the infant tree,
Lest the young sapling perish too.
I am not come for thee.”

Having selected the photographs of Una alone, she put the others back into the drawer, and then searched through her father’s paper for an envelope suitable to hold them.

“I am afraid,” she murmured, “that there is nothing here large enough to enclose them in. I saw some on Muriel’s writing table the other day that I think would do. I will go and see.”

She left the room leaving the photos, on the writing table. She passed through a small gate which Mr. Ford had put into the fence separating the “Waratahs” from “Fernly” a year ago, and when she returned in half an hour’s time with the envelopes, it was to find her husband standing by the table in Mr. Ford’s study, holding in his hand the photographs over which she had shed tears of reminiscence less than an hour ago.

CHAPTER XXI.

Douglas Willoughby smiled and raised his hat to Enid, turning to get a last glimpse of her when she stood on the verandah looking after the departing car.

"I cannot understand why I should be obsessed at the thought of leaving my little wife for only one night, especially when Muriel is with her," he mused. "It must be the knowledge of her approaching maternity that makes me uneasy, although the thought of the little one is happiness itself. What a sweet mother she will make. One has only to observe the love and care she gives her little sister to realise what a child of her own and mine will be to her."

The uneasy feeling was with him when the train bound for Newcastle steamed out of the Central Station. He was very anxious about his dearly loved young wife, especially as they had not been

able to secure the services of the nurse the doctor had so highly recommended.

Willoughby opened the "Sydney Morning Herald," and was soon absorbed in the news of the day. He had the carriage to himself until the train stopped at Hornsby, and there a woman, dressed in nurse's costume, stepped into the same compartment and seated herself opposite to him.

He glanced casually at her over the top of the paper. Surely he had met this woman somewhere before. He seemed to know her face. Ah! Yes, he remembered. It was the woman who had come forward to speak to Enid on the morning they had been admiring the beauty of the Amphitheatre in the Blue Mountains.

He sat deep in thought for some time. "Suppose Enid could procure the services of this woman; she was elderly, therefore experienced. She was evidently nursing in Australia, otherwise she would not be wearing uniform, and she had nursed Mrs. Ford when Doris was born. Perhaps she would understand Enid better than a stranger; at any rate, he would ask her, and see if she was engaged two months hence. If she were not he would give her his wife's address, and ask her to call."

"Excuse me," he said, raising his hat when the woman looked up and caught his glance fixed on her, "you are Nurse Lindsay, are you not?"

"Yes."

"You come from England?"

"From London, yes?"

"Do you remember nursing Mrs. Ford, the mother of the lady who was with me one morning early in the year when we met you at the Amphitheatre, in the Blue Mountains?"

"Yes," the nurse replied, her manner losing its stiffness, "I remember quite well, you were with Miss Enid Ford."

"Yes; who is my wife now," Willoughby replied. "She expects a baby about Christmas time, and the thought occurred to me when I saw you that perhaps you would nurse her."

"I would do so with all the pleasure in the world if my ability lay in that direction, but it does not; I am not a maternity nurse."

"Not a maternity nurse! You nursed Mrs. Ford!" he said in astonishment.

"Mrs. Ford died from the effects of pneumonia. It was eighteen years since she had given birth to her youngest, and at the time of her death her only daughter—"

"But the baby Doris?"

"The baby Doris was her granddaughter. You will excuse me, I get out here," as the train pulled up at Gosford.

Douglas Willoughby looked after Nurse Lindsay's retreating figure as one under the influence

of some horrible nightmare, when the woman hurried away, vexed with herself for having answered the young man's question. But there was something in Douglas Willoughby's personality which compelled respect and obedience, and she had replied to his questions almost before she was aware of it herself.

"I do hope I have betrayed no family secrets," she told herself. "Miss Ford's manner seemed strange that morning last summer when I met her on the Mountains. However, it cannot be helped now." She got into the dog cart that an anxious mother had sent to meet the nurse, who was to take charge of her son lying ill of typhoid fever, and in a few minutes was out of sight of the station.

Willoughby sank back against the cushioned seat. The woman's answer to this question had stunned him. Shocked and dazed he sat and stared after her. And then reason began to assert itself. He gathered his belongings together and got out of the train, which stops at Gosford for seven minutes. He would go back by the next train. He could not go on with such a tempest in his heart.

In vain he tried to order his chaotic thoughts. He got into the train as one in a dream. He closed his eyes, vainly groping for an escape from the dreadful labyrinth of doubt which had taken possession of him, and sinking deeper and deeper in

rumination. "Surely it could not be that Enid had deceived him."

The woman's words reverberated through his brain. "The baby Doris was her granddaughter." And again "her youngest daughter was eighteen years old when she died." The more he pondered the heavier grew his heart. "If Doris was not Mr. Ford's daughter she was evidently some relation. The child's likeness to Enid, that mark on her arm, the counterpart of the one on Mrs. Ford's wrist and on Enid's breast."

Little incidents which he had attached no importance to, assumed meaning now. He remembered the morning he had asked her to be his wife. He recalled to his mind how she had freed herself from his embrace to take Doris in her arms and fondly caress her.

"I have loved her from the moment of her birth," she had said, tenderly pressing the little form in her arms. And when he had consented to make his home with them she had smiled in glad relief, as she had said, "My little Doris shall be your little Doris." And again when Mr. Ford had given his consent to the marriage he had seemed graver than the occasion warranted. He told Willoughby that Doris would need none of his wealth, that some one who was a relation of hers, and to whom her mother had been dear, had endowed her with an ample fortune.

"Great God," he groaned, "it cannot be. If

I do not get at the truth of this soon, I shall go mad. I will go home and insist on an explanation from Enid."

When the train arrived in Sydney Willoughby got into a cab and was driven to "Fernly."

"Where is your mistress?" he asked the maid who opened the door.

"She is in Mr. Ford's study, Sir. I saw her go in there about half an hour ago."

He pushed the door, which was ajar, further open and entered. Enid was not there. He turned to leave the room when his eyes fell on some photographs lying face upwards on the table. He stepped nearer and looked down on them, and then laughed aloud with the excess of bitterness.

He stood with one photograph in his hand when his wife entered the room, and seeing him there she started back in amazement and surprise.

CHAPTER XXII.

"Douglas!"

A startled utterance of her husband's name escaped Enid's lips, as she came forward, white, trembling, letting the envelopes and the cardboard she had procured for the safer transmission of the photographs fall from her nerveless hand.

"I thought you were in Newcastle," she faltered, shrinking back from the blazing brown eyes. "Douglas, why do you look at me like that? I have done you no wrong."

"Your ideas of right and wrong are evidently a thing quite distinct and apart from other people's."

The girl's heart sank within her. She knew that in looking at that photograph Douglas had discovered the secret her father and herself had kept hidden from him. He would know that the original was her sister from the striking likeness

to herself, and would have no difficulty in recognising the baby in its mother's arms as Doris. The mark so plainly shown on the infant's arm would tell him that. In fancy she had often wondered what he would do if ever the true facts were made known to him, and she had told herself that Douglas was too generous, too liberal-minded to do other than sympathise with them in the sorrow that had been theirs. And now he stood like a relentless judge, confronting a criminal who had been found guilty of some unpardonable crime. He stood holding in his hand the photo and looking at her, his eyes flashing a flame from a deadly white face, and when he spoke his voice was terrible and wonderful. It seemed to have gathered into itself all the passion and tragedy and reproach of the world.

“So this is what has been troubling you. Not, as I supposed, a very natural regret for your mother's death, but the knowledge of your own sullied past, and I suppose the fear of being found out. You are not the only woman who has hidden and sheltered her infamy behind an honest man's name. I went away this morning with my heart full of love for the woman I thought you were. Full of sympathy for the trial you were to bear for the ‘first’ time. I return unexpectedly, it does not matter why, and I find this photograph of yourself.”

She looked dazedly at him. Something stirred within her heart like fire. Something seemed to

snap in her head. That he could have thought that of her! The knowledge was like a poison, a drug, a miasma that stifles, benumbs the senses. By a mighty effort she recalled her scattered wits as the cry escaped her.

"Merciful Heaven!"

She wrung her hands in despair. What should she say? How explain? She longed for her father's presence. She had given the promise to her dying mother never, under any circumstances, to divulge the secret of Doris' birth, and now Douglas stood there looking at her in silence, waiting for her to speak. But she could find no words. She was staring at him, her eyes dazed and piteous like the eyes of a dumb brute in pain.

Willoughby laughed discordantly.

"I see you do not attempt an explanation, knowing, I suppose, it would be quite useless, since I hold the proof of your guilt in my hand," he said. "Do you remember the morning I asked you to be my wife?"

"Yes."

"No doubt you laughed up your sleeve afterwards, when you remembered what an impression your splendid acting made on the poor trusting fool, who gave you a love that would have endured for all time. I could have sworn that your virginal soul awoke for the first time responsive to the love in mine. And all the time you had been the play-

thing of some other man. I have given a great love and reverence to the vile and unworthy."

She drew her breath with a dry rending sound that shook all her slender body.

"You never loved me," she cried; "if you had ever done so, you could never have found voice to utter the words you have spoken during the last half hour."

"You forget I had seen this picture of you before I spoke them; every feature of which is graven on my memory, and if the face of the photograph were obliterated, I should still know it was you. The dress you have worn so often because I liked it, is pictured here. I know the graceful lines of your figure too well to need the conclusive evidence. The mark on your breast and on the child's arm."

"You are cruel, pitiless!" the tortured, trembling girl cried.

"Cruel, pitiless, am I?" lashing himself to a white heat of scorn and anger. "It is you and your father who have been without pity when you became my wife and he connived at it. But you shall both answer for your deception."

"Douglas," she cried, her voice broken, as she threw herself on her knees at his feet, "visit any punishment you like on me, but do not, I implore you, torture my father by letting him know you have seen this photograph. As you are strong be merciful. Do not bring back the bitter sorrow which

shadowed his days and deprived my mother of life while yet in her prime."

"He will know it in any case when I leave you, when I fling his past-besmirched daughter back into his arms."

"When you go away, Douglas?" she said, her eyes dilating with a cringing fear. "You would not leave me!"

He looked down at her with a mocking smile.

"I presume you, even you, would not expect me to remain after seeing this," he said passionately. "Get up. Your acting is lost on me. Take this picture in your hand to remind yourself of what has been."

She rose slowly to her feet, her luminous eyes fixed on his relentless face as he put the cardboard into her stiff fingers.

"Have you no mercy?" she panted, letting the picture fall from her nerveless hand on to the carpet at her feet.

"I have too much mercy or I would kill you where you stand," advancing nearer to the terrified girl; "I should have no compunction in doing so, only that I do not wish to bring disgrace on Muriel and her boy by dragging an honored name in the dust, which must eventuate if I were to stand my trial for murder."

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Douglas!"

It was Muriel Ashworth's horrified voice that uttered his name this time. She advanced into the room, her eyes straying from her brother's blazing brown eyes and white set face to the marble countenance of the shrinking girl.

"You must be mad," she said, coming between them, "or you could never find it in your heart to speak to Enid like that. Have you forgotten that she is soon to become the mother of your child?"

"No," he answered recklessly, stooping to pick up the photo from the floor and put it in his breast pocket. "I only wish I could forget it. I can only pray that the child might die before it sees the light."

Muriel looked with horror, not unmingled with fear, on the contorted countenance of her brother. She put her arms round the trembling, swaying

figure of her sister-in-law, and leading her to an easy chair pushed her gently into it and stood before her.

"I cannot understand what has come between you, Douglas, but whatever it is, do not, I pray you, let any more such words pass your lips. You know the lines:—

'Boys flying kites haul in their white winged birds,
You can't do that way when you're flying words.'

"The trouble with me is," he said with a mirthless laugh, "that I cannot find words to express all I would say to this lady before I say farewell for ever. Perhaps Muriel," he said, unsteadily, "you would not blame us for this wordy conflict if you knew all."

"I should blame you for speaking like that if Enid had been guilty of even the sins of a Delilah. I am quite sure that whatever you imagine her to be guilty of could easily be explained. But," pointing to the white faced girl, "you have frightened her with your rough words and threatening attitude and made her incapable of speech. Dear," she continued, turning to Enid, "will you not explain away this dreadful thing that has come between you?"

"I am ready to listen to any explanation," he said more gently than he had spoken yet.

"I can offer none." The words came in gasps from Enid's white stiff lips.

"I thought not," he retorted with bitter irony: "even the most inventive of us find it difficult to explain away facts. I will leave you now," he said, turning to the storm tossed girl cowering in the easy chair, "for ever, and I pray God I may never look on your face again."

"Douglas!"

She had risen from her chair, her hands outstretched towards him as she uttered his name.

"Well?"

"You will not go!" she cried passionately, beseechingly. "I am not what you think. If you leave me now I shall die. You do not realise the depths of my love for you. It is not a chimera, a delusion, a fire kept alive with inflammable material ready to extinguish at the first blast of suspicion. It will live through life and beyond it. You are the heart of my heart, the life of my life. Do not leave me, if even you have nothing but contempt for me in your heart. Stay here for a few months at least, Douglas, do not go."

She was desperate at the thought of his going away, perhaps beyond recall. She wanted him to stay until she could formulate some plan of letting

him know the truth, which at the present moment she could not form from the chaos of her brain.

"Very pretty speech," he said; "I fancy I have heard part of it before. No doubt you have rehearsed it more than once in case you should require to give voice to it on an occasion like this."

'Douglas!' Muriel Ashworth's angry, indignant voice broke in, "have you no manliness in you. A day has dawned for me which I never thought could have been born, the day I am ashamed to call you brother. Go," she said angrily, stamping her foot; "go before you add murder to the sin of cruelty."

He looked at her in amazement. "Could this angry woman be his good tempered sister? This woman whose eyes so like his own, blazed with an anger almost equal to his own."

She had thrown a protecting arm round the almost fainting girl and with the other hand she pointed to the door.

He turned to do her bidding, and when he had nearly reached the threshold Doris, fresh from her afternoon sleep, came running in.

"Oh, Uncle," the child in glad surprise cried, her arms stretched upwards to embrace him, "I so pleased you comed home to-day, I——"

But in his hot and bitter anger the man pushed the caressing little hands roughly aside, incapable in that moment of knowing what he was doing, and

the child wounded, stung to the quick by a rebuff from one she loved, flew to the loving arms which had never failed her during the whole of her short and happy life. The last glimpse Douglas Willoughby had of his wife, as he turned his gaze on her for the last time as though impelled by some unseen force to do so, was of a bowed white form in an easy chair, her arms clasped round the little figure of the sobbing child. She raised her head for a brief moment and over the child's form her eyes met his. All her soul was in that look gazing out of her tortured eyes, and this picture was before his mental vision through all the weary sorrow laden weeks that passed before they met again.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Muriel Ashworth stood for some minutes after her brother had left the room, without speaking. Her thoughts were dominated by a heavy sense of oppression, the hand of calamity which had overtaken those near and dear to her. What was this dreadful thing that had come between the two who had loved each other so dearly? She turned and looked at Enid, who sat calm, dry-eyed, with the child upon her knee.

"My dear," Muriel said, kneeling down beside her, "can you not tell me what it all means?"

"I cannot, dear; any more than that fate has tangled the threads of my destiny, that only God Himself can untie the knots. Do not grieve for me, Muriel; I can bear my trial, as befits my father's daughter. But Douglas! He must suffer in the supposition that I am unworthy to be the mother of his child. If I could suffer alone, but the thought of his anguish gives me a wound as keen as a

poniard's point driven to my very heart. Only this morning I stood within his arms and every fibre of my being seemed rooted in his. Now, we are as far apart as——" Her voice broke as she rose, putting the now calm child on the ground.

It seemed to Enid that she would never be free again from the intolerable ache that rose and throbbed in throat and breast.

"Muriel," she said, "he loves you; go to him now and plead with him to stay here for a few months at least, until I can prove my innocence. My love for him is too great to let pride stand in the way."

When Muriel had left her and Doris had gone to her nurse, Enid stood for some minutes pressing her hands over her aching eyes; then she flung herself on her knees by the open window and dropped her head on her arms against the wide sill, her body shaken with the tearless gasping of her breath. "Oh, God!" she cried in hot rebellion, "what have I done that I should suffer so. I pray you make the way clear for the sake of the unborn child."

How long she remained there she did not know; the closing of the hall door startled her; she sprang to her feet when Muriel came into the room.

"Has he gone?" she asked, in her voice a great despair.

"Yes, dear, he has gone to Melbourne for a time. He has left you this note,"

The note was short, but every word gave a fresh stab to her tortured heart.

"I am going away," he wrote, "and I trust we may never meet again this side of the grave. Of what use your supplication that I should stay until you can prove your innocence, considering that I have in my possession the proof of your guilt. I am yielding to your wish to say nothing to your father. No doubt your inventive mind will concoct some tale to satisfy him as to my absence. I will arrange with my solicitor any monetary arrangement you may suggest. You have my assent to whatever plan you might make for the child's future, should it live. If you do not mind I shall keep 'the' photograph. The study of a mother and child is a subject which has always interested me."

"Enid!" Muriel Ashworth cried, springing to the girl's side, as for a moment she swayed unsteadily, "let me take you up to your own room."

"No," she answered; "Muriel, if you have any love for me left, any faith in me still, leave me to fight this out alone. Go, dear, I will see you this evening."

Left alone Enid turned to the table and took up the other two portraits lying face downwards upon it. She took them in her hand mechanically, and with the calmness that often follows a great nervous shock, put the three photographs, including the one of Una and herself together, into an envelope and addressed them to Ralph Thornton. If

she had been asked half an hour afterwards what had become of the portrait of the two sisters she could not have told. With dull pain zig-zagging through her confused mind she rang for a servant and gave the packet into her hand with a request that it should be sent to the post. She crossed the room and sank into the same easy chair she had sat in so short a time since, consoling Doris when her little heart had been grieved by an undeserved and unexpected rebuff.

Her supreme effort made, she was spent and broken. She laid her head back against the soft cushions and closed her eyes. She felt beaten, crushed. Her feeling was one of fatalistic submission; of what use her striving to find some way to prove her innocence when an unkind fate had marked her for his victim.

CHAPTER XXV.

On leaving Enid's presence Douglas Willoughby went straight to the telephone and rang up for a cab to be sent round in half an hour's time, and then ran quickly up to his dressing-room. He was thrusting his belongings into the portmanteau in direst confusion when Muriel entered the room after a tap on the door that he did not hear.

He turned to her when she spoke his name, and Muriel's tender heart throbbed with pity for the anguish and despair she read in his face. She knew it was only a great sorrow that could have taken all the light from his eyes; the healthy warm colour from his face, leaving it stricken to an utter desolation. It was hard to believe that this man, on whom the burden of a dozen more years seemed to have fallen in so short a time, was the light-hearted, sunny tempered man of yesterday.

"Douglas," Muriel said, her voice trembling, "you are not going away. You could not leave Enid

at a time like this. I am sure whatever you imagine her to be guilty of is a terrible mistake, and if you will only give her time she will be able to prove her innocence beyond the shadow of a doubt."

"You do not understand, dear," he said gently. "Muriel, I must go. Think what you like, and I trust you will throw all the blame on me, but I will never willingly look on her face again."

"Douglas, think of her state of health and have pity. Surely whatever you imagine her to have been guilty of cannot be so terrible that it would drive you from her side just now."

"My dear sister," the young man said, taking her in his arms and kissing her tear-stained face with loving tenderness, "if I could stay, your request would be the first thing to keep me, but I must go. I must put miles of distance between us. Do not grieve, little sister. No doubt Mr. Ford will be able to give his daughter all the consolation she needs, and now I must go," he said, unloosing her clinging arms and turning again to his packing.

"Where are you going, Douglas?"

"To Melbourne, I think. Next Tuesday is Cup Day, I shall just be in time for the festivities," he replied with bitter irony.

"Douglas, I cannot go back to Enid and tell her you have gone, it would kill her."

"It will not kill her, dear; she will quite expect me to depart. Wait. I will write her a note, it will save you the telling; and now, dear, good-bye. Do not cry, Muriel; your grief cuts me to the heart. Say good-bye to Leonard for me and try and not grieve, dear. The hardest part of the punishment of wrong doing is that the innocent must suffer for the guilty. I would not have brought a shadow of sorrow on your dear head if I could have helped it. I will write to you from Melbourne, and tell you my plans for the future, when my brain is clear enough to form them. Good-bye!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

Douglas Willoughby leaned back against his cushioned seat with closed eyes as the express, bound for Melbourne, sped through the summer night.

"Great God!" he mused, "that she could have worn so deceptive an exterior. What a monstrous deception she has practised on me. Her caresses, her endearments, her seeming innocence have been but the threads woven into one vast fabric of a lie."

Douglas Willoughby had all a strong man's pity for an erring woman. He had, through Muriel's agency, helped many a poor and penitent stranger on to the straight path again by giving freely out of his affluence. But this was so different. Sin in the abstract, sin that does not touch you personally, is so different from the ugly tangible thing that obtrudes upon your life and asks admittance into your home. Willoughby expected much because he

had given much. He worshipped the purity of woman. In asking Enid Ford to be his wife he had imagined that he asked for a pearl of purity, and now——. He leaned back with throbbing temples. "Could he ever recover from the hurt of the blow which had so unexpectedly fallen on him. And the child, the innocent unborn child. Great God," he prayed from the depths of his anguished heart, "I pray you in mercy let the child die before it lives to call her mother!"

But God who knows the secrets of all hearts must have turned a deaf ear to the prayer, which if granted would have been a curse. And He, knowing the depths of the anguish which prompted it, no doubt set His mills to work to right the wrong, as He always does in His own good time.

Willoughby's heart sank within him under the weight of his own despair. The more he pondered the heavier grew his heart. In vain he groped for a ray of light on his dark and lonely path. His palette and brushes had been washed of all but sombre colours, dark visaged grief would henceforth be his constant companion.

As the night wore on reason began to assert itself, as it always does when emotion subsides. He found himself calling to mind many things. After all neither he nor Muriel knew anything about Mr. Ford and his daughter other than they were cultured people in good circumstances. Muriel had taken them on trust, as Australians always do

people of their own class, whatever class they happen to belong to, provided they see no delinquency. He would like to know more about them, to find out the real facts which Mr. Ford had helped Enid to hide from him. He took the photograph from his breast pocket and tortured himself by studying it afresh. The face in the picture, whose every feature he knew so well, was that of a happy smiling girl, in whose beautiful long lashed eyes no shadow of sin lurked, and yet the small left hand was unadorned with the circlet of gold which means so much to a mother, the magic wedding ring.

"Great Heavens!" he thought, "that she should have seemed so pure and yet be conscious of this. I should like to know more about her past." And then a thought flashed through his mind that soon fanned itself into definite shape. "Why not go to England, to Kensington, where Mr. Ford had lived, and find out what there was to be learned. He had matured no plans as to his line of action, and in the present state of mind inaction would be torture. He would go straight through to Adelaide and catch the Orient boat that had left Sydney yesterday. He could get what things he wanted in Melbourne for the voyage and cash a cheque there.

So a few days later the Orient boat moved out of Larg's Bay carrying among her passengers Douglas Willoughby.

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Bitter tears often welled painfully in Enid's

throat during the days that followed. But for Muriel's sake she would not let them fall. It hurt her to see the pain in Muriel's brown eyes, just as it hurt her most to know that Douglas was the greatest sufferer of the three. She was conscious of her own innocence; he believed in her guilt, and she knew how terrible it would be to a man of his intensely proud nature to imagine the mother of his child to be a creature without purity, heart or conscience.

"Muriel," she said a week after her husband's departure, "have you had a letter from Douglas?"

Muriel felt as she turned to answer the question as if she held a scalpel in her hand with which she must cut deeper into a bleeding wound.

"Yes, dear," she said quietly, "he has gone abroad indefinitely. Enid, do not give way like that. Yield to my wish, dear. Write to your father and recall him. When you have told him all he may find some way out of this terrible maze."

"I cannot do that, Muriel; it hurts me to see the pain in your dear eyes. It would grieve me to the heart to see my father suffer, and I know he cannot help me. His lips are sealed by a promise to the dead. I can see no light ahead. I seem to be beating with desperate hands against the fast locked door of happiness. If I could go out into the darkness alone, but that Douglas must suffer too is maddening."

"Enid," Muriel said, drawing the girl's trembling form within her own warm arms, "you must trust in God and pray as I do that things may right themselves under His direction, and remember, dear, the precious Heaven-sent gift of motherhood is not one to be lightly treated. For the sake of the little life entrusted to your care keep up your health and spirit. Think what it will be to Douglas when the clouds roll away, as I am sure they will, for you to be able to give into his arms the little child that you have cherished and tenderly cared for because it is his. Be patient and hope, dear."

"I will," the younger woman cried, a new softness of colour in her face; "you have given me a watchword. I will be strong for the sake of Douglas' little child."

CHAPTER XXVII.

The boisterous wind had blown itself out during the night, and the morning broke in radiant freshness with a silvery sea and slanting sunbeams falling on the sheltered side of the deck, when Willoughby came up from the cabin to get a breath of the ocean after a sleepless night. The boat had left Colombo some days behind her and was running north into fine weather. Willoughby walked with a quick, swinging stride round the promenade deck several times, so lost in deep thought that he did not notice a little child who had come toddling over the bridge separating the first and second saloon decks until he almost stumbled over him. "Well, little man," he said looking at the child, "you are in danger here, let me take you back." He lifted the little fellow in his arms and carried him back. He gave him into the care of the mother who was searching for the child, and was turning to retrace his steps when he noticed a woman, sitting huddled

up in a deck chair, whose face was familiar; then as she looked up he remembered who she was. It was Ursuline Thornton, Ralph Thornton's wife. He went back to shake hands and make some remark about the beauty of the morning.

"You are looking ill," he said; "have you been sea-sick?"

"No, I am ill, but not with sea-sickness. I am at all times and in all weathers a good sailor."

"Are you going to England?"

"Yes," Mrs. Thornton replied, "to London."

After a few minutes' conversation on indifferent subjects he turned away, and it was not until they were in the Red Sea that he saw Ursuline again, and when he did, the great loom of fate began slowly to unravel and slip from the knots that the hands of an evil woman had wickedly, wilfully entangled.

One afternoon Willoughby sat in his deck chair with closed eyes when he heard his name uttered. He opened them to see a man dressed in the garb of a Catholic priest before him.

"You are Mr. Douglas Willoughby," the man asked abruptly.

"Yes," the other replied, surprised beyond measure.

Father Dalray looked at him steadily for a moment and then he said: "A lady in the second class has asked to see you; she is, I think, dying,

and she wants you to take a message to her husband, whom you know well, I believe."

"Is it Mrs. Thornton? I thought she looked very ill when last I saw her."

"Yes, it is Mrs. Thornton. Will you come?"

Willoughby followed Father Dalray down to the cabin where Ursuline lay dying. The priest left him to go in alone.

"You will ring for the stewardess if you see any need," he said to Willoughby before turning away.

Ursuline looked up from her pillows when Willoughby came to her side. His surprise that she had sent for him, an almost stranger, to carry her dying message to her husband, must have shown itself on his face for she said,

"You are astonished that I should send for you, but I know that you are well acquainted with Ralph Thornton, and I am trusting to your greater intelligence than any others around me, to give Ralph an exact account of what I am going to tell you. Father Dalray is only going as far as Gibraltar, or he would be my messenger. You do not mind?"

"Not in the least. I will most willingly deliver any message you would like to send. I suppose I can get into communication with him through his club?"

"Yes. And now if you will sit down I will tell

you a story that I want you to repeat word for word to Ralph when you reach London."

She drank some cordial from the glass at her side and then she began.

"I was an orphan at an early age, left to the care of an elder sister named Mrs. Halsford. She was married while I was still a child. She was devoted to me, and did everything in her power to check the mad impulses of my girlhood. We lived in New York during my youth, and when I was little more than a child I went on the stage. I was a chorus girl. Just before I reached my sixteenth year Mr. Halsford, my brother-in-law, died, and it was necessary for my sister to earn her own living. She obtained a position as stewardess on a steamer running between Plymouth and New York and kept that position for many years. When I was eighteen I married with my sister's approval a man named Martini, an Italian by birth, the same as myself. He was a billiard marker, although with his manner and education he ought to have been something better. I got tired of him and my humdrum existence. Before I was twenty-three I left him without letting him know where I was going, and went with a variety company to England. There I played a leading part, and posing as an unmarried woman had many admirers, among them your friend Ralph Thornton. He was rich and madly in love with me. I thought it was too good an opportunity to miss, and regardless of my former marriage I went

through the ceremony again with him on his twenty-first birthday. I was then twenty-four. His mother was furious at the marriage and would not receive me, and when the first glamour of his passion had gone, I could see that he regretted making me his wife. I suggested going to Australia, feeling safer there; I was always dreading that Martini would turn up and I would lose my life of affluence and be dragged down to poverty again. So after a good deal of persuasion to Australia we went. You remember we lived not far from your sister's residence in Sydney."

"Meanwhile my sister, Mrs. Halsford, had been transferred from the boat she was on to one running between Sydney and Southampton. I met her accidentally one day and she told me that Martini was in Australia. He had traced me to Sydney and intended to claim me as his wife. I met him unknown to anyone, at her suggestion, and I made a compromise; if he would keep silence for a month or two, I would persuade Ralph Thornton to return to England. Martini was to journey on the same boat on which my sister, Mrs. Halsford, travelled as stewardess. I concocted a plan of escape from Ralph Thornton, which I suppose will horrify you when you hear it, but time is fleeting and I cannot afford to mince matters. I persuaded my sister to help me with this fiendish action. Martini never had a sixpence to his name, and I pointed out to him if he helped me in my scheme we would have enough

money to start a hotel and billiard saloon in one of the Australian capitals. I pointed out to my sister that if Thornton should learn of my act of bigamy his revenge would be terrible, and so she consented to help me. I pretended to drown myself. I had picked a quarrel with Thornton just before dinner, and asked for fifty pounds, which I knew he would pay Martini after my supposed death. I ordered a bottle of brandy in his presence and emptied it of the greater portion, leaving the remainder where I knew he would come across it. My sister and I had arranged to have a pillow loaded with lead in the middle, ready in her cabin, so that when Thornton went up to dinner I could hasten to her cabin and slip the clothes I was wearing on the bundle. We knew that when the water had penetrated to the lead it would sink with its own weight. Well, when they were all at dinner and it was too dark to distinguish anything clearly, Mrs. Halsford went on deck and watched for me to push the bundle through the port hole. She waited until it was clear of the propeller and some distance away before she gave the alarm that a passenger had fallen overboard.

"I will not waste my strength giving you details; suffice it to say that before retiring to his cabin for the night Thornton sought Martini and gave him a cheque to clear my supposed gambling debt. I had saved a good deal of money out of my liberal allowance, and the diamonds I wore that

night brought us a small fortune, enough to start in a hotel in Adelaide.

"When we had been there about three years Martini was killed in a motor accident. I sold the business and went back to London. My money did not last long, and a couple of years after my arrival there I found myself penniless, with youth and beauty gone and no way of earning a living. I hope I may be forgiven for what I did then. Father Dalray says the confession of my sin to Thornton is the only way I can ever hope to obtain forgiveness.

"I knew that Thornton had married in the interim, and when his wife and he were sitting on the lawn at his house at Richmond I appeared before them. I knew he would pay me liberally to hold my tongue for her sake. Regardless of consequences, save to gain my own selfish ends, I blurted out the truth about my supposed drowning, withholding the information that I had ever been married previously. The look of horror on his face that morning haunts my memory now. He prevailed upon me to go quietly away. Before I turned to go I caught a glimpse of the young wife's face; she was only a girl in her teens. If I could forget it, if I only could. I went to a quiet lodging, as he had requested me, and sent word where I was to be seen. That same evening Mrs. Craik, his housekeeper, came to see me with a message from her master. She gave me a hundred pounds on the condition

that I would leave the neighbourhood at once. If I would leave some address where a letter would find me, her master would write to me in a week's time making an appointment to see me, so that we could arrange for me to draw an income through his solicitors. And when a fortnight later I did see him, even my callous heart was touched at the misery and despair on his face. I have drawn a liberal allowance from him ever since. I came out to Australia a year ago, thinking the climate would perhaps help me to get strong again, but the doctor I saw a few months ago told me that my days were numbered. I took this journey hoping to see Ralph Thornton and let him know the truth before I died. But I shall never reach England I know, and that is why I bothered you with my story, so that you can tell Thornton what I have told you. You are both well known to each other, so that will simplify matters."

Ursuline lay for just one minute silently looking into the horrified face of the man before her, and then she took from under her pillow a folded paper.

"I want you to give this to Ralph," she said, putting it into his hand; "it is a certificate of my marriage with Martini. And now, good-bye. I will not ask you to shake hands. I can see the loathing in your eyes for one so depraved as myself."

She was conscious of that instinctive drawing away, the uprising of that peculiar soul reserve we put between ourselves and creatures steeped in sin

and vice. Willoughby had unintentionally betrayed what he felt. She lay back on her pillows exhausted, when Willoughby had taken the paper from her hand. In sudden alarm the young man pressed the electric bell button and when the stewardess came he left the cabin without a backward glance at the wretched sinner there.

"Great heavens," he murmured, when retracing his steps to the other part of the steamer, "the duplicity of women. I am getting wiser every day. It seems to me I have this afternoon had a peep into the great mirror which reflects our little lives with all their imperfections and their sin."

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Next morning when Willoughby came on deck he crossed the bridge to speak to Father Dalray.

"How is it with Mrs. Thornton?" he asked.

"She is dead," the priest replied; "passed away at midnight, and may God have mercy on her soul."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The December afternoon was drawing to a close, the frozen ground lay under deep snows; the air was crystalline when Willoughby alighted from the taxi cab to keep his appointment with Ralph Thornton.

He passed up the broad carriage drive on foot. The trees with their brown bare limbs shawled in white stood like sentinels on either side. What a difference from last New Year's Eve at this hour. Then he had stood at the altar with a white robed bride beside him and the glorious sunshine lay like a benediction over the land of his birth and now—he caught his breath with a sob as he remembered it.

Coming in from the cold white world into the library, where Ralph Thornton awaited him, almost dazed Willoughby for a moment as his host rose to warmly shake hand,

"What a day for an Australian to be abroad," Thornton exclaimed. "I hope you have decided to accept my invitation given over the telephone and stay with me for some days at least. Wait, I will order some refreshment before you begin the story which you say is of such vital consequence to me."

Willoughby looked with interest and pity on the man before him, whom he had known when his years were few. It seemed almost impossible to connect this man, with the weary lined face and dark graying hair, with the young man who had so often played tennis with him when Willoughby was only a lad himself. In Thornton's heart desolation still reigned. Time that heals all wounds had not alleviated his suffering to any great extent. His empty arms yearned to hold Una's child to his heart, but even this consolation was denied him. He had stifled his own natural impulses when he had given the little one to the care of her grandfather. The possession of her would have been his Balm of Gilead, but because it was well for the child he had let her go to the loving arms of the young aunt who had suffered so much for her sake.

When the servant had placed refreshments on the table the two men drew their chairs together and lit their cigars.

Willoughby made but a pretence of smoking, and he had not gone far in his narrative, which he told much more lucidly than he had heard it, before Thornton's cigar dropped to the floor unheeded.

And when the story was told and Willoughby had given the marriage certificate entrusted to his care into the other man's hand another skein in the web of fate had been disentangled.

Outside the twilight deepened into darkness. The wind rose and whispered eerily round the corners, beating the snow against the windows. The fire was dying and Willoughby could find no words of comfort to speak to the man opposite, who sat with his head buried in his arms on the table.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"There is something gone wrong with the electric light, sir," Mrs. Craik said, showing Willoughby into a pretty bedroom where a cheerful fire burned in the grate, "can you manage to dress by the lamplight for to-night? If you should require anything else, sir, will you please ring for it; Mr. Thornton's man has put out your clothes."

"What a strange thing life is after all," Willoughby mused, as he began his toilette. "There poor Thornton has carried that burden of woe about with him all these years, separated from his young wife and knowing that she suffered too. By the way, I wonder what became of her, and if she is in England. He seemed so stunned at the news I imparted to him that I did not care to ask the poor beggar. Well, we all have our troubles to bear, doubly so when we take unto ourselves a wife," he told himself with bitter cynicism.

His toilette finished he was turning to leave

the room when happening to glance at the wall opposite he saw something that drove the blood from his heart and kept him rooted to the spot.

The room Willoughby had had assigned to him was the same room that Una Thornton had so lovingly ordered to be prepared for her young sister during her stay at Richmond now four years ago. The life-sized oil painting executed by her mother's loving hands of Una in her bridal dress hung there. Willoughby's fascinated eyes gazed at it as one in a dream. The beautiful lips smiled back at him, the long lashed eyes seemed to read his inmost soul. In the lamplight Una's blue eyes could not have been distinguished from Enid's gray ones. The wedding veil thrown carelessly back from the lovely young face darkened and almost hid the shining golden hair of the youthful bride. In her hands she held clasped in front of her a bridal bouquet composed of orange blossoms, and on her left hand the wedding ring gleamed with a strange significance to Willoughby's bewildered senses.

"Great Heavens," he cried, "she has been a bride, the wife of some other man before she left England, and evidently a happy bride, too, or that expression would not be there."

Willoughby had imagined that all his passionate, absorbing love for Enid had died a violent death two months ago, but now he knew when his glance rested on the lovely pictured face before him that it was not so. He was seared in the hell of

jealousy; she had belonged legally to someone else. "Was it Thornton? If so, great heavens, the child who by now must have seen the light if it had lived, was his." The shadow darkened, and his imagination conjured up a little child with features a mixture of the lovely face on the wall and his own brown eyes; eyes which held a reproach because it was a child of the unwed, of unlawful begetting.

He fell on his knees in bitter anguish, a great benumbing agony surged through him. It was his hour of fire and he shrank from the red hot scars. The strong man trembled in deadly fear that the child might have lived, the innocent little babe whose coming had brought him a thrill of delight only a few months ago and now—"Dear God!"

A knock on the door brought him quickly to his feet; he opened it to admit Ralph Thornton.

"Are you ready," Thornton asked. "If so, we will go down to dinner."

With a sense of unreality about him, Willoughby followed his host downstairs in silence. It seemed to him that he was only subconscious of what was going on round him. He was trying to form some plan from the chaos of his brain, as to how he should deal with the threads of fate which lay within his hand.

CHAPTER XXX.

Dinner was over and Thornton and Willoughby were back in the library. Neither man had done more than make a pretence of eating the daintily-cooked, well-served meal.

Thornton was almost silent, absorbed in reminiscences of the past which the story he had listened to so short a time since had brought vividly back to his memory. Willoughby would have made some excuse for leaving him to himself, but he felt that reason would desert him if Thornton did not dispel or verify his conviction that the original of the picture upstairs was his (Thornton's) wife; and although he shrunk from probing the wound he knew the other carried with him, he told himself that before he slept that night he must learn the truth or go mad; but he was at his wits' end to know how to open up such a subject. By a strenuous effort he forced himself to say:

"Thornton, forgive me for approaching a subject which I know must be painful, but was there a

child of your second marriage, your real marriage?"

His host looked at him surprised out of himself at the abruptness of the question and the want of good taste in asking the same, and then he remembered that this man had been good enough to listen to and faithfully retail Ursuline's dying confession, and would no doubt like to hear the sequel of his marriage.

"Yes," he answered, lifting his dark, sombre eyes to the other's face, "there was one child, a little girl named Doris; she is in Australia with her grandfather, Mr. Ford, where she has passed as his own child, because—because—"

His deep voice faltered and for a few minutes there was silence, and then Thornton pulled himself together. He did not notice the deathly white face of the man opposite him.

"Willoughby," he said, "since you have been so painstaking and kind as to bring me that message I will tell you the story of my second marriage, if you care to hear it. I have made up my mind since you imparted your news to me this afternoon that I will go to Australia and see my little daughter. There is no longer any reason for me to hide the secret of her birth, and I can now claim my child before the world. You know of my supposed first marriage and its end. Well, four years after my return from Australia I married one of the sweetest, loveliest, whitest-souled girls in England.

How we loved each other! How happy we were during the twelve months that followed our union. And when our little Doris was born our joy was too great for me to describe. My wife was not strong for a long time after the baby came, and it was six weeks old when she came downstairs for the first time. How happy we were. To me the world seemed a paradise. The only shadow that rested on my darling's heart that day was that she had lost her wedding ring; her fingers had grown so thin during her illness that it must have slipped off and—" For a moment his voice failed him; he looked at his listener, but the man before him was still, rigid, tense, his eyes the only living thing in his dead white face, and seeing the intense interest of his visitor, Thornton controlled himself by a force of will and went on:

"Willoughby, on that day in the morning I stood on the sun-kissed heights of happiness, in the evening I lay in the black abyss of despair. Wait, I have a photo of my wife here taken in the forenoon of that particular day. I only received it by post from Mr. Ford a week ago. Here it is." Pulling out of a drawer in the table near him, Thornton selected the photograph from two others and held it out to his visitor.

Willoughby took the picture with frozen fingers. In the heat of that fire-warmed room he almost shivered with a stealing cold that was mounting to his heart. It was a likeness of Una standing

alone among the roses, the white embroidered dress falling from her slim waist in graceful folds. How well he knew those lovely features; they were graven on his memory, as sculptors trace on ivory, with red hot tools. His hand was visibly shaking when he gave the photograph back.

"Tell me," he said in a new strange voice, "tell me the rest."

Thornton laid the picture away reverently, tenderly, and when he spoke again his voice trembled with emotion.

"Willoughby," he said, leaning forward a little, "you see her there replete with life and the best that life can give. That photograph was taken just before noon, and—and—three hours later she lay dead in my arms."

Douglas Willoughby's sense and sight and brain reeled. He stared dumbly across the table to where Thornton sat for several moments in intense silence. Somewhere within the recesses of his mind a film was slowly, haltingly unrolling with a blurred sense of unbelief. Then there rushed over his dazed senses a sudden clear consciousness of what the other had said; "she lay dead in my arms."

"She lay dead in your arms," Willoughby repeated uncomprehendingly as a child cons an unintelligible lesson, "she lay dead in your arms. Did she? Did you? The child."

"The child was taken to Australia, to Sydney, by my wife's father and sister," Thornton replied,

wondering at the incoherence of the other's question.

"Your wife's sister," Willoughby muttered dully

"Yes, my wife's younger sister, Enid Ford."

In an instant Willoughby was on his feet, his lethargy gone.

"Your wife had a sister?" he queried, steadying his voice with a strong effort; "a younger sister; were they very much alike?"

"No, not in the flesh. Wait, I have a photograph of the two girls here. This one is Una, my wife," with a tender reverent intonation on the dear name, "and the other, of course, is Enid. They were so much alike in form and feature that in this photograph you would not know one from the other, especially as they are dressed alike, but in the flesh you would not have mistaken one for the other. Una was fair, with golden hair and blue eyes, while Enid has chestnut hair and beautiful dark grey eyes."

Thornton put the photograph in the younger man's stiff fingers, whose eyes fastened eagerly on it. Two girlish figures exactly alike stood on a grassy lawn with a rose wreathed arbor for a background. Two beautiful young faces looked back at him. Dearly as he loved the younger sister it would have been impossible for him to distinguish one from the other if Thornton had not pointed it out. He stood there motionless with the cardboard in his

hand. Through a sudden mist of tears he saw before his mental vision a pair of dark fathomless grey eyes wherein he had seen his own image so often reflected, and he remembered in a wave of agony the expression they held on that unforgettable afternoon. She had stood when he cruelly used those bitter, insulting words, like a dumb creature, who, being almost done to death by the hunter, waits for the final blow which is to deprive it of life. Dear God, would he ever be able to atone! And the innocent little child whom he had so cruelly told her he prayed might die. He felt like a murderer, and most likely he was one. Could that pure innocent young mother have endured so much and have lived? If Douglas Willoughby had committed the sin of judging too hastily, he made full expiation for it in that moment of bitter agonising remorse.

Before his dimming eyes the two figures in the picture were fading away. His faculties seemed to be slipping away when Thornton's surprised voice recalled his wandering wits. He started at the sound of it, and the next minute he astonished the elder man by sinking back into his chair and covering his face with his hands. He burst into a storm of dry, tearless sobs that shook his strong frame and racked his quivering nerves. Thornton watched him in silence, too surprised for words; presently tears rushed up to cool the bitterness that choked him. And then a thread of golden joy ran through him, and out of his intolerable agony of remorse

surged up a wild exultation that Enid, whom he had loved so passionately, had proved worthy of his trust, and if she still lived, was his. If she still lived. The wringing physical pain at his heart at the mere thought brought him quickly to his feet again.

"Thornton," he said, stretching out his hand, "do you know I am Enid Ford's husband, and even now may be the father of her child?"

And during the hour that followed, when explanations were given and received, the dark curtain was drawn aside, and Willoughby learned why Mr. Ford and Enid had practised the innocent deception which had borne such bitter fruit, and how a faithfully-kept promise to her dying mother had sealed Enid's lips. If he had only known that there had been two sisters. If he had only known!

CHAPTER XXXI.

"And you believed that of Enid?" Thornton said, with withering scorn in his cold voice. "Sweet innocent Enid, who, I am sure, never committed a mortal sin in her life. That was her reward for taking my motherless little child to her heart. You had been married to her for ten months before you saw that picture, and yet you believed it to be her. I have often heard Australians commended for their quick discernment, their clear penetration. But you had been her constant companion for nearly a year. You must have looked into the inmost recesses of her heart. Her soul must have been laid bare before you, and yet you charged her with a sin as black as that. Mr. Ford wrote to me only a few months ago. He told me what a fine, manly fellow Enid's husband was, but through an oversight omitted the name. I am surprised that he did not enlighten you. I know that he gave that promise to his dying wife reluctantly. I am quite

sure he would have felt justified in breaking a promise made to satisfy the vague imperceptible wishes of a dying woman, knowing that the mother to whom he gave the promise would have been the last to hold him to his word, where her daughter's happiness was at stake."

The man thus arraigned stood silent, finding no words or wish to justify himself, and then Thornton went on, exceeding bitterness creeping into his voice.

"It seems to me that the consequences of my early folly are never to be at an end. It broke my mother's heart; it killed my darling (with a quick indrawing of his breath), and then Mrs. Ford, and now, for all we know, Enid may have ended her sinless life, too. Do you think," turning with a passionate gesture to Willoughby, "that she could have lived through her trial with a weight like that pressing on her heart? Wait, where are you going?"

"I am going to cable without delay," the other replied; "and when I receive an answer I shall start on my return journey to Australia by the quickest route possible."

"Stay. I will ask them to telephone for a cab to be sent round," Thornton said, ringing the bell; "and when you return to Australia I will go with you."

CHAPTER XXXII.

Enid came back to consciousness to find Douglas Willoughby's son resting in the big white bed beside her. For days she lay there unseeing, dreaming. Her face scarcely less white than the dainty lace hangings of her bed; her great, haunting eyes looking in space. She lay there inert, supine, lazily comfortable from sheer weakness. Her interest in things round her was of a vague description, she seemed to look on life from afar off. Nothing seemed to matter much. There was an all-pervading sense of restful indifference to things terrestrial. Her splendid vitality, her self-dependence seemed to fall entirely away from her through all those dreamy hours, and the passages from wakefulness to sleep were very sweet, after the torture of mind she had endured since the afternoon she had received that great shock which had caused such soul storms, such nerve-racking tension. The only thing that seemed to rouse her was the move-

ment of the little baby beside her, or the lusty cry from a pair of healthy little lungs.

Muriel Ashworth scarcely left the sick chamber in those days. She was more anxious about Enid than if she had shown interest as to whether it might be night or day, morning, noon, or evening. Muriel was sorely afraid that Enid's lassitude, her utter indifference to the responsibility of existence might end in the weakness preceding death, while the dread angel, quick to take advantage, might spread his pinions over the beautiful bed-chamber, and carry away his fair victim. Muriel would have given much to have been able to break that dreadful calm, but both doctor and nurse forbade it. Doris and Leonard had gone to Katoomba with a friend of Mrs. Ashworth's, so there were no shouts of childish laughter, no patter of little feet to disturb the quiet house and gladden Mr. Ford's heart. No soft arms to clasp his neck, no sweet voice to demand that he should put Doris to sleep. Mr. Ford had returned to Sydney on Christmas eve, just when Enid's little son was a few hours old, and Muriel's vague, unsatisfactory answers when he wanted to know why her brother was absent, filled him with misgivings. A heavy sense of oppression dominated him during the week that came between Christmas and New Year, and he often wondered afterwards what he would have done but for Muriel's comforting presence. She brought him every bit of good news from the sick room, and omitted to tell

him the bad, hoping against hope that Enid would show some sign of returning strength on the morrow. At last she knew that she must no longer keep from him the knowledge that Enid was not getting any stronger, and on New Year's morning she went slowly, sorrowfully downstairs to preside at Mr. Ford's breakfast-table, quite determined that as soon as the meal was over she would gently break to him that the doctor was anxious and fearful about Enid's condition.

A flood of sunshine greeted her when she entered the breakfast-room, which seemed to find its reflection in the face of the man who sat there with two cablegrams before him on the table.

"Muriel," he exclaimed, when she came wondering forward, "I know now why you were so reticent as to your brother's absence. Read these two messages, and when you have done so I will tell you what they mean."

Muriel's surprised eyes fastened themselves on the written words. The first one was from Douglas Willoughby, and read as follows:—

"Can you ever forgive me for my doubts of Enid? Cable immediately if all is well with her. Give her my fondest love, and tell her I live but in the hope of her pardon."

The second message from Ralph Thornton was:—

“Ursuline Maynard was legally married two years before I met her, to a man who was still alive, and she went through the ceremony with me. I have seen Willoughby, and told him all. We both leave for Australia to-morrow.”

Half an hour later Muriel Ashworth was on her way upstairs with the cable messages in her hand and joy and fear in her heart. Joy, because she knew what she had to tell would lift the burden from her sister-in-law's heart; fear, in case the message might have come too late.

“Will you go down to breakfast now, Nurse?” she said, on entering the room; “I will stay with Mrs. Willoughby until your return.”

And when the nurse came back to her patient she was surprised and relieved to find instead of the weakly, quiescent, semi-somnolent invalid, a tearful, pale, but fully-awakened young mother, clasping in her arms in a very rapture of love Douglas Willoughby's infant son.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Mr. Ford stood at the Central Railway Station with Leonard and Doris by his side. Both children were in a state of excitement, waiting the coming of Uncle. Doris, in a white dress and lace hat, was as dainty and lovely a picture as Nature had ever fashioned. Muriel Ashworth had dressed the child herself. In her tender, womanly heart she felt that Doris must look her fairest when her father's longing eyes would rest for the first time on the lovely little maiden.

"Ah, here comes the train, Mr. Ford," Leonard exclaimed, when the express appeared in sight, and a few minutes later Mr. Ford had clasped Willoughby's hand in friendly greeting, and then turned to Thornton.

"I cannot tell you how pleased we are to see you, Ralph," he said, with deep feeling in his voice. "Yes, Enid is getting along nicely, and the baby is a fine little fellow. Doris!"

He saw the yearning in Thornton's eyes as they watched the child spring to Willoughby's embrace, but Doris was fondly clasped in Uncle's arms, her sweet face pressed against his. Willoughby felt that he would give much to be able to forget how he had repulsed this innocent little maid's caresses when last he had seen her, and the thought made him clasp her closer, and kiss her more fondly than he had ever done before. He put her into her father's outstretched arms when Mr. Ford called her name.

Mr. Ford and Willoughby, taking Leonard, busied themselves looking after the luggage, leaving Doris in the hungry arms that had yearned for her burden for years. Thornton looked down into the child's sweet face, his dark eyes brooding over all her baby charms, and then he clasped and kissed her so passionately that the little one was frightened. She pushed her small hands against his breast, while she looked wonderingly into his face. The dark eyes she gazed into were full of tears, and the soft little heart was touched by the emotion she did not understand.

"Do you want Doris to love you?" the sweet, childish voice asked, while the starry, sapphire eyes so like her mother's, sent a thrill of tender remembrance through his throbbing brain. "Well," condescendingly, "I let you carry me out to the motor-car."

Thornton followed Leonard, who had been sent

to pilot him to the waiting car, with the child in his arms. When they were all seated, and the car started off, Doris scrambled from her father's arms on to Willoughby's knee. She had some news for him, and she wanted to be the first to tell it.

"Do you know, Uncle, Enid has a baby, a real baby that can open his eyes and cry when nurse bathes him?"

"Has she, little one?" Willoughby said, with a falter in his full, rich voice, "and does it love Doris?"

"No; it's too disagreeable; it sleeps all the time, and never opens his eyes to look at anything pretty when mother and nurse and me takes him for a drive."

Ralph Thornton started at the child's careless utterance of the sacred name which would have been Una's if she had lived. Mr. Ford answered his unspoken question.

"Doris has called Mrs. Ashworth 'mother' ever since she could speak," he said; "she heard Leonard do so, and, indeed, since Enid's illness, Mrs. Ashworth has been like a mother to her."

Muriel met the travellers when they came in from the noontide heat in the hall. Brother and sister embraced each other tenderly, and then Muriel said: "Enid is upstairs in her own room, Douglas; she is alone, and waiting for you. Remember to keep as calm as possible; she is not very strong

yet." She watched him with tears in her eyes as he quickly mounted the thickly-carpeted stairs, and then she turned to the others.

"Come into the drawing-room," she said; "lunch will be ready in an hour's time. Doris!"

Muriel saw Thornton's eyes follow the child's figure when she would have run off with Leonard, and she called her back.

They made their way into the pretty room where the silvery spray of the fountain in the conservatory and the soft greenery of the ferns and plants brought a sense of peace and rest to the weary traveller. It was years since Thornton had felt his burden of sorrow rest so lightly on his heart as he did to-day. The sweet home atmosphere, the presence of this gracious, kindly woman, and Mr. Ford's warm welcome, intensified the joy he felt in his re-union with Una's child.

"Enid is coming downstairs to lunch to-day; she has been looking forward to seeing you with much joy, Mr. Thornton," Muriel said, smiling at the pretty child on her father's knee, a big doll with hair and eyes exactly the colour of her own, that he had brought her, clasped fondly in her soft little arms.

Mrs. Ashworth looked up to see a maid with a very anxious face, waiting to speak to her. She rose from her seat, and when she had exchanged a few words with the girl, turned back for a minute.

"If you will excuse me," she said, "I will return presently."

When Mr. Ford and Thornton were left alone the elder man said: "So Una was your wife, after all, Ralph?"

"Yes," the other replied, with a quick catch in his breath; and looking down on the child's golden head, "I thank God for that, but that my darling should have been deprived of life through an evil woman's black lie, cut down in the very springtime of youth by an undeserved blow, and her mother—" Thornton's voice broke, while a pulse beat heavily in his throat.

"Do not give way, Ralph," Mr. Ford said, although his own voice was not quite firm, "God's ways are not our ways, and our darlings are enjoying a happiness that is longer delayed to us. Ralph, you must stay with us now. You cannot live apart from your daughter, and we cannot give her up. I am hoping that you will marry again; you are young enough to be happy yet in some good woman's love."

"I will never do that," Thornton said, his eyes fixed, not on Mr. Ford, but on Doris' lovely little face; "no other woman could take the place of my child's mother."

"You think that now," Mr. Ford said, gently; "but you are only thirty-four years old, too young to live without a mate to share your joys and sorrows, and you have riches and an old and honoured name

to bestow on some good woman. Come, I will show you up to your room, so that you can refresh yourself with a change of toilet before lunch, should you wish it."

The two men went upstairs, Doris still fondly clasped in her father's arms. They had just got to the first landing when they almost ran into Muriel, who did not see them, because her eyes were full of tears.

"What is the matter, Muriel?" Mr. Ford asked; "is all well with Enid?"

"Yes," Muriel answered, drying her eyes, a flood of crimson dyeing her face because Thornton (a stranger) should have seen her in tears, "Enid is all right, I have just come from her room."

Mr. Ford took Muriel's hand and patted it as if she had been physically hurt, and Doris stretched both arms out to clasp her neck, leaving the doll on her father's shoulder.

"Come to Doris," she said, in her sweet, childish way, "come to Doris; she will make poor mother better."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Meanwhile, with some trepidation and a fast beating heart, Willoughby quickly ascended the thickly-carpeted stairs, down which he had come in such anger and despair on that memorable afternoon last year. The door of Enid's room was open when he reached there, and Enid, clad in a loose white gown, reclined in an easy chair with cushioned back and sides.

He came forward with eager words of love on his lips, his arms outstretched. She rose and let them encircle her. "Ah! blissful moment; could it ever repay her for all the weary hours of hope and longing." He caught her in a passionate embrace, forgetting in the absorbing tide of love that swept over him how far from strong she was.

"My love, my darling," he cried, "tell me that you have forgiven me, that you do not hate me."

She lay in his arms spent, breathless from the ardour of his embrace. She raised her eyes for a

moment to his, but even as their lips clung together her spirit drifted away into unconsciousness. He felt her grow heavy in his arms, and felt the sudden chill of her lips against his. He looked down at her in sudden alarm, her eyes were closed, and from her face all colour had fled. She looked, "Ah, God!" he shuddered; she looked like a dead child.

"I have killed her with my rough caresses," he cried, thinking, despairingly, of how her fair young sister had died from sudden shock.

He laid her on the bed and rang the bell, and when the maid came in, he said:

"Ask Mrs. Ashworth to come at once, Mrs. Wilmoughby has fainted."

Muriel was more alarmed than she would have cared to admit when she bent over Enid's deathly white face and still form, and quite ten minutes passed before the girl revived under her gentle administration. At last the long lashes were lifted, and the luminous grey eyes looked wonderingly into Muriel's alarmed face. She lay quite still for some moments, and then she said:

"Muriel, did I faint? Was Douglas here?"

"Yes, dear, Douglas is here. No, you must not attempt to get up. You must lie quite still. Here is Douglas," drawing him forward. "Now, drink this wine, dear."

Enid obediently swallowed the wine held to her lips, and then turned to nestle in the arms of her husband sitting on the bed beside her. There was

silence for a little while, and then Enid, the warm colour flooding into her cheeks, said :

"Muriel, will you ask nurse to bring baby to see his father?"

"I will go and bring him myself, dear; but, remember, you are to lie quite still till I return."

And when Muriel brought the baby and laid him in his father's arms, even the most exacting mother would not have complained of the lack of warmth and affection with which Willoughby greeted his first born. He held the little form tenderly and pressed warm kisses on the child's sleeping face. A deep heartfelt prayer of thankfulness went up to Heaven that God had not granted his frenzied supplication. A great tear fell on the infant's face, waking him from his slumber. He opened his great grey eyes, so like Enid's, and looked up at his father, almost as if he knew what was passing in the man's mind. The father who had prayed for his death.

Muriel felt a sudden rush of tears to her eyes, tears which she could not keep back. She left the room abruptly, going quickly downstairs to seek the seclusion of her own apartments where she could let her tears fall unrestrained, but she had only reached the first landing when she almost ran into Mr. Ford and Ralph Thornton.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Six months later a happy, laughing group of people were assembled on the balcony of the Waratahs, a post of vantage that commanded an unobscured view of Sydney Harbour. Presently America's great white fleet would come and anchor there. Earlier in the morning a merry party had motored down to Coogee, where, from the esplanade, they had watched a graceful line of ships follow the "Connecticut" through the blue sun-kissed waters. The warships had each come in sight gradually, gracefully, as if they would impress the eager onlooker with their grandeur and their power.

Mr. Ford, Douglas and Enid Willoughby, Ralph Thornton, and Muriel Ashworth were among the gay laughing people on the balcony. Leonard and some boy friends were sitting on the stone wall that divided the grounds of the Waratahs from Sydney Harbour. Douglas and Enid Willoughby stood a little

apart from the rest, Enid's little hands clasped together round her husband's arm, while ever and anon her glance wandered down to the green lawn, where, on a rustic seat, a nurse held a laughing baby boy on her lap, who crowed with delight at the dancing, joyous little figure of Doris, who seemed in the embodiment of her perfect health, as if it were impossible for her to keep still.

Presently the group on the balcony strained their eyes to catch the first glimpse of the "Connecticut" when she glided gracefully through the calm waters to her anchorage.

"Here they come," exclaimed Thornton; "can you see them, Muriel?" handing her a field glass as he spoke.

"Yes," she replied, adjusting the glasses to suit her sight.

Mr. Ford looked at the couple beside him with satisfied eyes. Only yesterday Muriel Ashworth had promised to become Ralph Thornton's wife, to the great delight of all. The tender sympathy Muriel had felt and shown for Doris' father had aroused in Thornton's long-starved heart a feeling of gratitude and liking, and gradually that feeling had ripened into something warmer. Mr. Ford had become quite a matchmaker. It was he who had first sown the

seed in Thornton's mind, which, to his great satisfaction, was to bear fruit. The two people he had such a warm liking for, were to become man and wife, so the name which Doris had called Douglas Willoughby and his sister by in her childish innocence, were to be theirs by right.

While the others were intent on watching the American Fleet, Mr. Ford's glance strayed down to the nurse and children on the lawn, and the present rolled away. The outside world and the years that had elapsed were forgotten. He was back in the past. He remembered when he and Alma had looked on just such a scene, when Doris' mother had been the child playing among the flowers and Enid the laughing baby on her nurse's lap. Doris was her mother's living counterpart, and Enid's baby had his mother's grey eyes. Mr. Ford was alone in that crowd of well-dressed, laughing people. The sight of the children on the lawn brought back the vanished faces that were dust in the churchyard now. Doris, happening to look up, caught her grandfather's gaze, and laughingly blew him a kiss over her small, dimpled hand. Mr. Ford's lips parted in a tender smile at the beautiful little girl. No other grandchild could ever be as dear to him as Doris, and a fervent "Thank God" arose from his lips that no stain of illegitimacy rested on that innocent head.

The same evening Douglas Willoughby came

into the drawing-room at Fernleigh and found Enid sitting at the piano singing in her sweet voice :

So long the day, so dark the way,
Dear heart, before you came;
It seems to me it cannot be,
This world is still the same,
For then I stood as in some wood
And vainly sought for light,
But now day dawns on sunlit lawns,
And life is glad and bright.

He came softly behind her and drew her head back against his breast.

"Look up at me, sweetheart," he commanded.

"Yes, certainly, my lord," she responded; "do you want to be certain of the colour of my eyes?"

"No," he answered, pressing his lips to hers; "I want to be certain that no shadow of the past lies there."

"Ah, Douglas," she answered, rising from the piano to nestle in his arms, "there never could be a shadow which the sunshine of your love would not disperse."

(The End.)

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